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Marx and Democracy

Terrell Carver
University of Bristol, UK

Tuesday, October 10, 2017, 3:00-5:00
Department of Sociology
Common Room - 2101 Vari Hall

Abstract: In political terms Marx was much more of a democrat than many of his followers have wanted to admit. His political allies in the 1840s were 'bourgeois liberals', and he was wholly on the side of struggles and revolutions to establish constitutional regimes. In terms of suffrage and economics he was of course a 'left' democrat, but one who advocated working class action against middle class forces only with great reluctance. Many of his 'political' works have been devalued, compared with those that have taken pride of place as 'theory'. And some of his 'theoretical' works make more sense when read contextually as political interventions. One of these is 'The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte', which contains a novel theory of democracy, but one not yet appreciated either in the literatures on Marx or on democratic theory. Marx argues that representative democracy and military dictatorship are not poles apart as political constructions, but rather balanced 'on a knife's edge' by ever-present political forces. His account of French revolutionary and counter-revolutionary politics points to the crucial role of elected politicians in representative democracies and how easily they can be turned to abolish the very institutions that they had sworn to uphold. This theory clarifies many of the conflicts and struggles that have taken place since that time - and indeed are occurring in the present - in apparently 'democratic' countries worldwide.

Discussant: George Comninel, Department of Politics, York University

Admission to this activity is free - no registration.

Organized by Marx Collegium, York University
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Contact: marcello.musto@gmail.com