



Call for papers for an *ephemera* conference and special issue on:

Depoliticization and the Political Today

Conference organizers: Centre for Ethics and Politics (CfEP),
School of Business and Management; Queen Mary, University of
London, UK

20-21 May 2016

Accounts of neoliberalism have focused principally upon regimes of accumulation and their socio-economic conditions and consequences. From outsourcing to de-industrialisation and privatised Keynesianism through to concerted and widespread attacks on labour, these shifts have been framed by commentators in terms of the ‘restoration of class power’. The epochal transformations of administrative, state and IFI structures and operations have, through the fetishistic mantra of privatization, sought to downgrade state sovereignty to a universalised ‘Washington Consensus’. Such changes have also promoted alternative forms of subjectivation, such as the indebted precariat, the globalised postcolonial, and the entrepreneurial self. Attempting to move beyond these interpretations of neoliberalism, the focus of this event will be on the *political* effects of the neoliberal change via the theme of ‘depoliticization’. We understand processes and discourses of depoliticization as a particular political strategy that emerges as part of the broader project of neoliberalism, central to which is the fetishism of an “a-

political” market place. Whether we think of the recent work of Wendy Brown on de-democratisation, Peter Mair on the ‘hollowing of Western democracy’, David Graeber linking neo-liberalism to an anti-democratic bureaucratic totalization, or Wolfgang Streeck’s analysis of the technocratic transformation of the EU as a means to stave off another ‘legitimation crisis’, contemporary analyses have begun to detect a conjuncture of targets and instruments in neoliberal institutionalization which we engage here as widespread phenomena of depoliticization. These convergences entail a reshaping of the very structures of the political life of modernity, perhaps most obviously in the gradual retreat of its foundation – even if only ideological and rhetorical – in representative government, but also in the very forms of politics and the meaning of political representation.

With regard to the historical development of neoliberal attitudes towards democracy and the popular will, it is in the supposedly ‘neutral’ depoliticised market place where social ties would become constituted mainly (if not only) according to market relations. Such a development would thereby enable the market to recreate the subject as primarily an economic citizen. Indeed, neoliberalism is driven by a fear of ‘transient majorities’, informing what we understand to be a set of interrelated projects for the ‘depoliticization’ of life. More, through managerial technique, neo-liberals found concrete means by which to link economic logics and wider projects of depoliticization through the building of ‘spontaneous’ new routines, as counters to threats of democratic contestation. The routines of the assembly line and bureaucratic organization promoted a world wherein work became a means to an end – an end bound up with wider calculative mindsets that have extended to developments in marketing logics and consumerist cultures. The authoritarian workplace was thereby invested with a wider significance by neoliberals in contributing to the denial of an agora in wider society where democracy might take place.

Today, postcolonial debt politics applies pain to whole homogenised nations wherein each individual is held responsible for personal debt regardless of relations of class, power, and domination within the society as a whole (e.g. Greece, Afghanistan, Haiti). No matter which solutions a sovereign state’s people would like to self-impose, the markets must be satisfied; democratic politics is trumped by an economics whose political nature is denied. This event will look both within and beyond European borders to ask how a politics of solidarity across global north and postcolonial spaces can both mark and practically dismantle these violent ‘depoliticising’ regimes.

Review of Themes

This event seeks to consider the value of the theme of depoliticization for an engagement with the wider political logics and strategies of neoliberalism, drawing connections between neoliberal currents of thought and particular organizational and institutional sites and locales. Within these broad subject areas, possible sub-topics may include, though of course not restricted to:

- De-democratisation
- Expert cultures
- Governance and governmentality
- Financial markets
- Algorithmic technocracy
- Politics of the workplace
- Postcolonial depoliticization
- Cognitive capital and changes in property structures
- Privatisation of war and security

Deadlines and Further Information

- The deadline for submitting abstracts is **31st January 2016**
- Abstracts of no more than 500 words should be submitted to Dr Rowland Curtis r.curtis@qmul.ac.uk
- Notifications of acceptance will be provided by 29th February 2016
- The event will be free to all participants by registration
- It is planned that a special themed issue for *ephemera* will follow from the event

Indicative References

- Brown, W (2003) 'Neo-Liberalism and the End of Liberal Democracy', *Theory and Event* 7:1. (Fall 2003)
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- Davies, W. (2014) *The Limits of Neoliberalism*, London, Sage Publications Limited.
- Graeber, D. (2015) *The Utopia of Rules – On Technology, Stupidity, and the Secret Joys of Bureaucracy*, London, Melville House.

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- Hanlon, G. (2015) *The Dark Side of Management – a Secret History of Management Theory*, London, Routledge.
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- Mair, P. (2013), *Ruling the Void: The Hollowing Out of Democracy*, London, Verso.
- Mayo, E. (1919) *Democracy and Freedom – An Essay in Social Logic*. Melbourne, Macmillan and Co.
- Mises, L. von (1944), *Bureaucracy*, New Haven, Yale University Press.
- Rose, N. (1998), *Inventing Our Selves: Psychology, Power and Personhood*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press
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