

MARXISM



AND THE ENDS

OF LIBERALISM

**2022 PLATYPUS
INTERNATIONAL CONVENTION**

CHICAGO, MARCH 31 – APRIL 2



Contact:

- Clint Montgomery, +1-901-734-2774
- Addison Kwasigroch, +1-331-205-0914

Marxism and the Ends of Liberalism

2022 International Convention
The Platypus Affiliated Society



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Statement of Purpose

The Platypus Affiliated Society, established in December 2006, organizes reading groups, public fora, research and journalism focused on problems and tasks inherited from the „Old„ (1920s–30s), „New“ (1960s–70s) and post-political (1980s–90s) Left for the possibilities of emancipatory politics today.

Platypus is a project for the self-criticism, self-education, and, ultimately, the practical reconstitution of a Marxian Left. At present the Marxist Left appears as a historical ruin. The received wisdom of today dictates that past, failed attempts at emancipation stand not as moments full of potential yet to be redeemed, but rather as “what was” — utopianism that was bound to end in tragedy. As critical inheritors of a vanquished tradition, Platypus contends that — after the failure of the 1960s New Left, and the dismantlement of the welfare state and the destruction of the Soviet Union in the 1980s–90s — the present disorientation of the Left means we can hardly claim to know the tasks and goals of social emancipation better than the “utopians” of the past did.

Our task is critique and education towards the reconstitution of a Marxian Left. Platypus contends that the ruin of the Marxist Left as it stands today is of a tradition whose defeat was largely self-inflicted, hence at present the Marxist Left is historical, and in such a grave state of decomposition that it has become exceedingly difficult to draft coherently programmatic social-political demands. In the face of the catastrophic past and present, the first task for the reconstitution of a Marxian Left as an emancipatory force is to recognize the reasons for the historical failure of Marxism and to clarify the necessity of a Marxian Left for the present and future. — If the Left is to change the world, it must first transform itself!

The improbable — but not impossible — reconstitution of an emancipatory Left is an urgent task; we believe that the future of humanity depends on it. While the devastating forces unleashed by modern society — capitalism — remain, the unfulfilled promise of social emancipation still calls for redemption. To abdicate this or to obscure the gravity of past defeats and failures by looking to “resistance” from “outside” the dynamics of modern society is to affirm its present and guarantee its future destructive reality.

Platypus asks the questions: How is the thought of critical theorists of modern society such as Marx, Lukács, Benjamin and Adorno relevant for the struggle for social emancipation today? How can we make sense of the long history of impoverished politics on the Left leading to the present — after the international Marxist Left of Lenin, Luxemburg and Trotsky, to the barrenness of today — without being terrorized or discouraged by this history? — How might the answers to such questions help the urgent task of reconstituting the Left at its most fundamental levels of theory and practice? How might we help effect escape from the dead-end the Left has become? We hope to re-invigorate a conversation on the Left that has long since fallen into senility or silence, in order to help found anew an emancipatory political practice that is presently absent.

What has the Left been, and what can it yet become? — Platypus exists because the answer to such a question, even its basic formulation, has long ceased to be self-evident.

April 2007

platypus1917.org

3/31/22

Thursday

UChicago

12-2pm — Cloister Club in Ida Noyes Hall

EU, NATO and the Left

NATO and the EU, emblematic of the Cold War and neoliberalism, reflect different moments in the 20th century wake of the death of the Left. At the beginning of the crisis of neoliberalism, the Left was against the EU as the centerpoint of austerity; more recently, much of the Left has turned to defending the EU as the bastion of liberal cosmopolitanism against a resurgent nationalism. A similar reversal can be seen around NATO, with some Leftists opposing it in the name of anti-imperialism and some supporting it in the name of liberal democracy. How has the Left taken up the question of liberalism? What historical problems are being worked through in the positions taken? How do Leftist positions to NATO and the EU obscure both the deeper task of socialism and new possibilities?

3-5pm — Cloister Club in Ida Noyes Hall

Post-Pandemic Politics

How did the Left respond to the pandemic? How did the Left express antinomies in politics, e.g. civil liberty vs state-management? How has the pandemic affected the way young people think about the history of the Left? What stands in the way of renewing Marxist politics after the pandemic?

6-8pm — Cloister Club in Ida Noyes Hall

The Legacy of the 1980s

We invite the panelists to reflect upon the trajectories of their personal political development. How were you politicized? What was your experience being on the Left in the 1980s like? What specifically did the 1980s Left inherit from the 1960-1970s New Left and even earlier generations of the Left? What made it necessary (or unnecessary) to invoke and reinscribe Marxism in the 1980s? How did neoliberalism and the Cold War affect the tasks set forth for the Left then? From the standpoint of 2022, what did the 1980s Left amount to?

Speakers:

- James Heartfield
- Lance Selfa
- Andony Melathopoulos
- Douglas Lain

4/1/22

Friday

UChicago

9am-12pm — Cloister Club in Ida Noyes Hall

President, Regional and Platypus Review Reports

1-3pm — Cloister Club in Ida Noyes Hall

Marxism and Liberalism

What is liberalism? Why is liberalism in crisis today and how long has liberalism been in crisis? Why did Marx both take up and critique liberalism? What can we learn from that today? What is the relationship of Marxism to liberalism?

Speakers:

- Anthony Monteiro
- Benjamin Studebaker
- Spencer Leonard
- James Heartfield

4-6pm — Kent 120

What is Leadership for the Left?

Historically, Marxists have emphasized the proletarian class and its political arm, the political party, as the revolutionary leadership in a democratic revolution. In the 20th century, radicals considered both alternatives (e.g. people of color, women) or some qualified vanguard e.g. black proletariat. Who should lead society and what does it mean to lead? Do the most oppressed and marginalized per se have revolutionary subjectivity? What is the relationship between Democracy and Revolutionary Leadership? What would it mean for leadership of society to be posed by the Left?

Speakers:

- Anthony Monteiro
- Parker McQueeney
- Mario Diaz-Perez
- Andy Thayer

8-11pm — Exchequer, 226 S Wabash Ave

Party

4/2/22

Saturday

Northwestern University

10am-12pm — Harris Hall 107

Workshop on the Platypus Tripod

1-3pm — Harris Hall 107

Biden, COVID and the Left

At its birth, the Millennial Left aspired to pose a political challenge to neoliberalism; in 2020, the Millennial Left wanted to fight the right to get a lesser evil in office and has apparently succeeded, collapsing back into the neoliberal antinomy of progressive statism and personal responsibility as a result. How could the COVID-crisis have presented an opportunity for the Left to break with the politics of the Democratic Party? What do the responses by the state and civil society to the pandemic reflect, not about neoliberalism, but about capitalism per se? How should the Left think about post-pandemic politics, even as the aim of building a mass movement and party remains ever more distant?

Speakers:

- Anthony Monteiro
- Conrad Hamilton
- Benjamin Balthaser
- Cam Hardy

4-6pm — Harris Hall 107

What is Marxism for?

Was the Millennial Left Marxist? What was not Marxist about it? What is the relevance of Marxism today? Why is it necessary to recover or return to Marxism and what would it mean to go beyond it? What is the point of leadership by Marxist intellectuals? Is that necessary?

Speakers:

- James Heartfield
- Benjamin Studebaker
- Chris Cutrone
- Donald Parkinson

8pm-midnight — Archer Beach House, 3016 S Archer Ave

Party

Maps

1 Kent 120

2 Cloister Club in Ida Noyes Hall



Exchequer



Archer Beach House



Harris Hall 107

