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Back to the Future

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TRACK 30: Organization After Empire? State, Corporate and Popular Reactions and Resistances to the Crises of Capitalism

Track chairs:

Stephen Linstead (contact)

University of York

sl519@york.ac.uk

+441904434649

Stefano Harney

Queen Mary University London

S.Harney@qmul.ac.uk

Garance Marechal

University of Liverpool

g.marechal@liv.ac.uk

+441517953808

Abstract:

Critical historical approaches to the study of capitalism and political economy and the dark side of globalization (including the sources of the current crisis) have been revitalized by Boltanski and Chiapello's *The New Capitalism* (1999 and 2005) and Hardt and Negri's *Empire* (2000) and *Multitude* (2004). *Empire* became a best-seller by reinterpreting the past and arguing that the historical objectives pursued by political and military means are now pursued by social, cultural and economic means, and global hegemony at this level extends from previous more obviously aggressive historical imperial forms. Hardt and Negri argued that boundaries become increasingly blurred between cultural politics, political economy, cultural economy and political aesthetics, as culture becomes commodified and plasticized and processors of both information and materials shape and may dominate processes of government. After the Second Gulf War it at first appeared that the Corporation, rather than the State, was the prime determinant of political agendas and that military means to achieving these were as important as ever. But more recently, since the Credit Crunch, the State's role has been temporarily revitalized, in response to the often desperate entreaties from those who for two decades had been most firmly resistant to state intervention in business affairs. Is this really a return to the past or is it a fundamental change in relations, and power balance, between parliamentary bodies, Wall Street and the High Street? Has the march of Empire been stalled, reversed, or just slowed? Do we know enough about the new workings of Empire to even hazard a guess?

Since the Second World War, globalization as a process has been encouraged under the auspices of the UN, the GATT, the World Bank and more recently the WTO, exerting pressure on both developing and developed nations to structure their economies in particular ways. Since the 1970s this has reflected monetarist approaches to state control and intervention, away from welfare. During the 1990s, efforts were made to curb the worst effects and promote the benefits of globalization. The UN recently launched the Global Compact, and with several universities and business schools, national management associations and academies, and corporations the UN has formed the *Global Forum for Business as an Agent of World Benefit* (BAWB), and the *Principles of Responsible Management Education* (PRME) initiative. Whilst the Global Forum announces its 2009 objective as a “task of historic significance”, are these efforts just another ideological elaboration of the mask that keeps the world safe for capital?

In this stream we seek to build on past work introducing the ideas of the new critique of capital into organization studies to ask deeper questions about the nature of the current crisis of capitalism, the recent history of the corporation and its influence, the nature of global collusions between corporations and governments, the role of educational institutions, the realities and possibilities of resistance, the future role and power of the state and its potential forms – and the implications of all this for organizations and organizing. We are keen to encourage both new reflections grounded in philosophy and organization theory as well as empirical and historical analyses of the ways in which empire and corporate histories intersect, particularly through ever more sophisticated processes of commodification. We encourage methodological diversity in progressing debates, and welcome discursive analyses as well as quantitative approaches if clearly grounded in well articulated ideas. Contributions that utilize analyses of forms of popular culture, including feature films, documentaries and press coverage, are also welcome.

Keywords: globalization; critique of capital; changing role of the state; role of education