

From the Demise of Social Democracy to the ‘End of Capitalism’

The Intellectual Trajectory of Wolfgang Streeck

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Abstract

Over the past decade, Wolfgang Streeck has emerged as one of the most prominent voices in the debate on the crisis of democratic capitalism. This article provides a critical appraisal of Streeck's recent writings in light of his wider intellectual trajectory, tracing the evolutions and continuities in his work over time; highlighting its important contributions to our understanding of the present crisis; and presenting a fourfold critique of his latest book on the end of capitalism. The main argument is that Streeck's work, while very valuable for its elucidation of the dynamics behind the demise of social democracy, ultimately remains plagued by a corporatist residue that keeps him from drawing his increasingly radical critique of capitalism to its logical conclusions. As a result, Streeck's embrace of an exceedingly catastrophist worldview, devoid of any emancipatory potential, has tempted him to veer dangerously close to the welfare chauvinism of the nationalist right.

Keywords

political economy – crisis theory – public debt – finance – Eurozone – democracy – capitalism – Marxism

Introduction

Over the past decade, Wolfgang Streeck has emerged as one of the most prominent critical voices in the debate on the crisis of global capitalism and its implications for the quality of democracy. For those familiar with his past

work, Streeck's recent writings have been a remarkable case study in scholarly reinvention. As Germany's pre-eminent economic sociologist and one of Europe's most-cited political economists, Streeck's intellectual trajectory had long mirrored the broader political trajectory of social democracy. In the early years of his career, his self-professed objective was always to prove that capitalism and democracy could be reconciled, and that under the right institutional arrangements the power of the market could be harnessed to the ends of economic progress, social solidarity and a more equitable redistribution of resources. In the 1990s, as centre-left parties lurched to the right under the combined pressures of globalisation and the ideological triumph of neoliberalism, Streeck's work became increasingly concerned with the compatibility between social democracy's redistributive politics and the emerging reality of a globalised world economy – a challenge he sought to resolve by urging the need for 'social productivism' and 'national competitiveness'.¹ It was around this time that Streeck assumed the directorship of the prestigious Max Planck Institute for the Study of Societies (MPIfG), and briefly served as an advisor to the first Schröder government's tripartite Alliance for Employment (*Bündnis für Arbeit*).

Starting in the early 2000s, however, Streeck slowly began to lose faith in social-democratic politics and the future viability of the postwar class compromise. The financial crash of 2008 and the Eurozone debt crisis that followed in its wake had a catalysing effect in this respect. Ever since, Streeck's work has been characterised by an increasingly radical reassessment of the inherent incompatibility between capitalism and democracy, and an increasingly vocal denouncement of the multiple 'morbidity' eating away at the capitalist social order more generally. In a series of papers and books – most prominently *Buying Time*, published by Verso in 2014 – Streeck has presented a rousing and compelling critique of the transformations of the capitalist state and the 'delayed crisis of democratic capitalism'.² More recently, Verso has published a new collection of his essays, whose provocative title – *How Will Capitalism End?* – neatly illustrates just how far Streeck's research project has come since the heyday of Third Way politics in the 1990s.³ In many respects, to read Streeck in the present historical conjuncture is to witness social democracy become self-conscious of its own demise.

It is precisely for this reason that critical political-economy scholarship would be well advised to constructively engage with Streeck's ongoing research

1 See, for instance, Rogers and Streeck 1994; Streeck 1999a.

2 Streeck 2014a.

3 Streeck 2016a.

programme – if only to help deepen its understanding of the structural dynamics behind the demise of social democracy and the broader challenges this poses to a reinvigorated radical-democratic politics. At the same time, however, it is important to note that Streeck's work is also marked by a number of continuities that have kept him from drawing his increasingly radical critique of global capitalism to its logical conclusions. Most importantly, as I will seek to demonstrate in this article, the baseline of the *Trente Glorieuses*, the 'golden age' of democratic capitalism in the OECD countries during the postwar decades, remains fully operative in Streeck's work 'as a nostalgic horizon – one that functions to enact the very foreclosure of radical thinking about the future that he diagnoses'.⁴ This in turn has important implications for Streeck's assessment of the prospects – and, as the case may be, the prophesied *end* – of capitalism.

In this article, I therefore propose a critical but constructive reading of Streeck's recent work that, while recognising its important contributions to our understanding of the crisis sequence that has beset the OECD countries since the 1970s, also highlights the problematic political conclusions that flow from his residual commitment to a collapsed social-democratic horizon. I develop this argument in three steps. In the first part of the article, I will briefly trace Streeck's political and intellectual trajectory back to its roots in an essentially neo-corporatist *Weltanschauung*, identifying both a number of important evolutions and a set of equally important continuities in his overall orientation. In the second part, I will discuss Streeck's treatment of public debt and the crisis of democratic capitalism, highlighting both its important contributions to crisis theory and some of its possible shortcomings. In the third and final part, I will then develop a fourfold critique of Streeck's most recent writings on the end of capitalism, where the aforementioned neo-corporatist continuities in his work appear to pose the greatest analytical problems.

I conclude by arguing that Streeck's vision of the future ultimately echoes a long-standing tradition of catastrophist theorising on the left concerning the inevitability and entirely self-driven nature of capitalist collapse. However, since this vision is now emptied of any emancipatory content, Streeck's account does not only end up underplaying the open-ended nature of the disorderly transition the capitalist world system is currently passing through, but also leaves a political void at the heart of his analysis that increasingly tempts him to fall back onto national borders as a 'last line of defence' for the welfare state against the further encroachment of 'destabilising' external forces – including not only international capital flows but also international migration. As I will

4 I owe the phrasing of this critique to Nikhil Singh.

argue, a more comprehensive engagement with contemporary Marxist scholarship and ongoing social struggles could have inoculated Streeck against the temptation to retreat behind national borders, and made him more attentive to the structural indeterminacy that he himself identifies as characteristic of the current historical moment.

1 Evolutions and Continuities

To better understand Streeck's recent writings on the crisis of democratic capitalism, it is useful to place them in the perspective of his wider intellectual trajectory. The first thing to note, in this respect, is that – radical rhetoric notwithstanding – the theoretical perspective presented in *Buying Time* and *How Will Capitalism End?* does not necessarily constitute a fundamental rupture with Streeck's previous scholarship. As he pointed out in his final director's report to the MPIfG advisory board before his retirement in 2014, 'experience tells me ... that all-too-radical departures from one's established path should not even be tried, if only because older commitments will always pull you back.'⁵ Any critical analysis of Streeck's recent writings therefore has to start from an engagement with his older political commitments and the somewhat less obvious theoretical continuities in his work over time.

1.1 *From Social Democrat to 'Reluctant Radical'*

Starting out on the left wing of social democracy as a student in Frankfurt, Streeck was always well versed in the Marxian crisis theories of the 1970s, but never had much patience for political or scholarly radicalism. In a recent interview, he recounts that

the Marxism of the 1970s that I encountered as a student seemed dry and abstract to me. There was no life in it, only structures and definitions, and 'laws' of which I could not make sense. I had come to social science because I was curious to see what the world out there was like, the world of real people.⁶

For Streeck, this 'world of real people' was to be studied principally through the prism of its institutional representation – that is to say, from the perspective of collective bargaining, interest intermediation and the 'inclusion of

⁵ Streeck 2014b.

⁶ Streeck 2016b.

labour and its organisations in public policy'.⁷ This fundamentally corporatist *Weltanschauung* has proven to be an important constant in his work over the decades.

By his own admission, Streeck's early contributions were 'driven by an intention to prove the possibility of social democracy under capitalism'. In hindsight, he now reflects that 'it was "wishful thinking," in the sense that I wished that what could be shown to be possible could eventually be made real'.⁸ This 'wishful thinking' even briefly seduced him to embrace the rightward drift of Schröder's neoliberal Third Way: by the late 1990s, he was openly calling for the 'flexibilisation' of the German labour market, writing that 'in the economic conditions of today, originally benevolent market-modifying institutions that civilised capitalism without detracting from its performance may turn into liabilities'.⁹ Streeck now recounts that he 'hoped we could ride the wave of marketisation to save the welfare state by making it fit for a global economy.' But '[i]t soon became clear that this was the last round for European social democracy, and that we were not winning. We were reforming capitalism, and only later noticed that capitalism had been re-forming under our very eyes'.¹⁰

It was this realisation, which slowly began to dawn in the mid-2000s but did not fully settle in until after 2008, that propelled Streeck to abandon some of his earlier views and manoeuvre himself into a new position that Miriam Ronzoni has appropriately referred to as that of a 'reluctant radical'.¹¹ The events of 2008 were a 'revelation' in this respect, when Streeck 'fully realised for the first time how dependent states, politics and social democracy had become on a global financial sector out of control and run by people with oligarchic aspirations who had no clue what they were doing'.¹² Today, Streeck proclaims to be outraged at the economic transformations of the last decades, and 'disappointed that my past hopes for a serious reform of the political system have proven such a failure'.¹³ This strong sense of indignation has given Streeck's recent writings an increasingly anti-capitalist air, at times even appearing to betray budding insurrectionary aspirations: 'Will there be ... a re-politicisation of the American political economy?' he recently asked in a review of Krippner's book on the rise of finance. 'I will believe it when I see the first windows being

7 Streeck 2014b.

8 Streeck 2016b.

9 Streeck 1999b; Streeck 1999a, p. 4.

10 Streeck 2016b.

11 Ronzoni 2015.

12 Ronzoni 2015, p. 15.

13 Cited in Haegens 2013 (translated by the author).

smashed on Fifth Avenue.¹⁴ These fiery flashes of radical rhetoric, so characteristic of Streeck's writing by now, have moved even his intellectual adversary Jürgen Habermas to praise the combination of 'political passion' and 'sweeping and empirically founded inquiry' in *Buying Time* as reminiscent of Marx's *Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*.

The invocation of Marx here is no accident: Streeck has readily admitted to the increasingly Marxian nature of his recent work. As Ronzoni notes, 'reluctant radicals' like Streeck and Piketty:

... struggle to reconcile their nostalgic sympathy for postwar mixed economies with the increasingly acute awareness that Marxists were probably partly right in denouncing social democracy as a self-deception, as an illusion that capital could be tamed. ... [Piketty and Streeck's books] address, respectively, the economics and the politics of the same phenomenon: the crisis of social democratic optimism ... It is as if both authors are hesitating on the edge of a steep cliff, wondering whether they should jump – and become radical anti-capitalists – or not.¹⁵

For Streeck, it was the devastating impact of the global financial crisis that 'finally sealed it all', compelling him to acknowledge that social democracy – and hence his entire intellectual project up to that point – had become a political and academic dead-end. This is when reality kicked in: 'I needed a new framework, away from wishful demonstrations of the possible to a realistic accounting of the real.'¹⁶

1.2 *Evolving Approach to the Study of Capitalism*

In truth, this new framework had already been some time in the making. The theoretical foundations and general explanatory categories that Streeck now draws upon to develop his increasingly radical arguments about the crisis of democracy and the end of capitalism are the same he mobilised in his analysis of the 'disorganisation' of the German political economy in the mid-2000s, which itself hinged on insights he derived from his theoretical work on historical institutionalism and comparative capitalism in the 1990s – which in turn arose from his long-standing interest in neo-corporatism over the preceding

14 Streeck 2012a, p. 413.

15 Ronzoni 2015, p. 6; Piketty 2013.

16 Streeck 2014b.

decades.¹⁷ Still, despite these important continuities, Streeck's work has undoubtedly evolved in a number of important ways.

This evolution must first of all be read against the background of Streeck's mounting disillusionment with the 'increasingly static-functionalist-economistic outlook of what had become the Varieties of Capitalism [VoC] mainstream'.¹⁸ Narrowly concerned with synchronic variation across space and institutional continuity over time, the VoC literature had become increasingly unable to see the forest for the trees – or capitalism for its varieties. Streeck's work on institutional change had, for some time already, been pushing him in the opposite direction: emphasising diachronic variation over time and commonalities across space. His widely cited 2005 book with Kathleen Thelen, a foundational text in the development of historical institutionalism, emphasised the importance of *transformative gradual change* as distinct from 'adaptive-incremental' or 'fundamental-discontinuous' change.¹⁹ For Streeck, this notion proved 'particularly suited for understanding the slowly moving but nevertheless fundamental liberalisation of capitalist political economies since the 1980s' – a theme he would take up in greater detail in *Re-Forming Capitalism*.²⁰

Today, Streeck conceptualises capitalism not as an economy but as an *historical social order* – one that is reproduced through social action, undergoing continuous change, and held together by a dynamic and evolving set of social institutions.²¹ The study of capitalism therefore properly falls within the remit of the discipline of sociology, not of economics, and cannot be divorced from the historical analysis of slow-moving processes of institutional change.²² This in turn calls for an eclectic approach drawing on the classical political economists and economic sociologists, including Marx, Weber, Sombart, Schumpeter and Polanyi, for whom capitalism was always characterised by 'endogenous dynamism, critical instability and continuous change'.²³ Streeck's view of capitalism thus stands in stark contrast to the 'essentially frozen' account of the VoC school, which is much more interested in *contrasting* policy outcomes between countries than in identifying *comparable* processes of dynamic social change over time.²⁴

17 Ibid.

18 Ibid.

19 Streeck and Thelen 2005.

20 Streeck 2014b; Streeck 2008.

21 Streeck 2010a.

22 Streeck 2012b, p. 2.

23 Streeck 2012b, pp. 4–5.

24 Hall and Soskice 2001; Streeck 2012b, p. 22.

These theoretical insights have a number of important implications for the study of capitalism, which can be summarised under three main headings. First, Streeck proposes to study capitalism not as a variety of political-economic systems, in which the emphasis is bound to be on their national particularities, but rather as an 'internationally variegated capitalist world system', in which the commonalities between places are often much more interesting than the differences.²⁵ He even argues that 'the very notion of sectorally and institutionally complete, symmetric and therefore comparable national capitalist systems may have to be given up' in favour of a mode of analysis that recognises national and regional variation but situates it within an overarching framework of complex systemic interdependence.²⁶ This, of course, is by no means an original insight: world-systems analysis has long proposed precisely this type of approach to the study of capitalism.²⁷

Second, Streeck's definition of capitalism as a social order that is constantly evolving as a result of 'endogenous pressures for continuous expansion'²⁸ calls for a supersession of the *static cross-sectional approach* of the comparative-capitalism literature with a *longitudinal-historical approach* that places gradual transformative change at the heart of the analysis. As noted before, Streeck's previous theoretical work with Thelen had already primed him to the observation that 'important social change sometimes proceeds so slowly and gradually as to be imperceptible in the short run'.²⁹ This, then, warrants a focus on what could be called the *moyenne durée* of political-economic change, leading to a historically informed mode of analysis that remains foundational to Streeck's reading of the crisis of democracy and his recent prognoses on the end of capitalism.³⁰

This brings us to the third and final point, which is the intrinsically chaotic, conflictual and crisis-prone nature of capitalism as a social order. As Streeck himself puts it, 'Once you bring back history into social science, ... you cannot possibly bypass Marx.'³¹ Hence the need to restore centrality to key explanatory categories like power, class, conflict, structure, constraint and crisis – concepts that have always played an important role in Marxian scholarship, but that hardly made any appearance in the comparative-capitalism literature of the past decades. 'After what has happened since 2008', Streeck writes:

25 Streeck 2010b, pp. 38–9.

26 Streeck 2010b, p. 38.

27 See Wallerstein 1974.

28 Streeck 2010b, p. 35.

29 Streeck 2010b, pp. 510–11.

30 Mader 2013; Streeck 2016a.

31 Streeck 2016b.

... no one can understand politics and political institutions without closely relating them to markets and economic interests, as well as the class structures and conflicts arising from them. Whether or not this is 'Marxist' or 'neo-Marxist' is a matter of complete indifference to me ... In any event, I am convinced that present trends in modern societies cannot be even approximately understood without the help of key concepts from the Marxian tradition.³²

Like Marx, Streeck considers capitalism to be 'fundamentally unruly: a permanent source of disorder from the perspective of social institutions'.³³ More than Marx, however, it is probably Polanyi who leaves the most important imprint on Streeck's approach, especially insofar as he stresses the conflict between 'market justice' (which operates in accordance with the logic of competition) and 'social justice' (which operates in accordance with social norms), arguing that 'conflicts under capitalism are more than just struggles over the distribution of the results of joint production: importantly, they are also about which spheres of life should legitimately be subject to commodification and which should remain protected from the expansion of market relations'.³⁴

This Polanyian perspective in turn propels Streeck towards an emphasis on the social institutions devised to contain the expansion of the market and protect society from its chaotic and 'disorganised' logic. Such institutional containments do not come ready-made; they have to be integrated into capitalism through the political struggles of organised counter-movements. Here we arrive at one of Streeck's most important claims: the idea that, as an inherently conflictive and unstable system, capitalism is *dependent on effective opposition* for its own long-term survival.³⁵ However, given capital's unceasing efforts to liberate itself from all social constraints, institutional arrangements devised to contain 'the vagaries of the market' are always precarious and at risk of being dismantled or undermined by competitive pressures.³⁶ 'Preventing this', Streeck argues, 'requires a noncapitalist politics capable of defining and enforcing general interests in the sustainability of human society, bringing capitalist actors to their senses and forcing them to act in line with better insights'.³⁷

This is where the corporatist legacy in Streeck's approach most clearly comes to the fore, in the sense that organised labour is seen to provide a crucial

32 Streeck 2014a, pp. xv–xvi.

33 Streeck 2008, pp. 16–17, 241.

34 Streeck 2010c, p. 36.

35 Streeck 2012b, p. 25; Streeck 2016a.

36 Streeck 2010a, p. 33.

37 Streeck 2012b, p. 26.

counterweight to the system's predatory tendencies, and therefore a central and necessary element in the stable functioning of capitalism as a social order. Only when its opposition is fully incorporated into the political system does a form of 'organised' capitalism emerge that can stave off the self-destructive logic of 'disorganised' market competition by embedding economic relations in a set of institutional arrangements to guarantee the collectively beneficial outcome of the individual pursuit of profit.³⁸ This, of course, is precisely the opposite of what has been happening since the 1980s, when capitalism was gradually unleashed from any social constraints: 'As it extricated itself from the social-democratic regime imposed on its after 1945,' Streeck writes, 'it became *more like itself*, revealing in the course of its development its "true nature," or its "essence." ... In the neoliberal era ... *capitalism became progressively more capitalist*.'³⁹

2 The Crisis of Democratic Capitalism

It was on the basis of these methodological and theoretical foundations that, from around 2010 onwards, Streeck began to turn his attention towards the implications of the global financial crisis for the political-economic systems of Western Europe and North America. Building on his understanding of transformative change as unfolding gradually over time, he proposes to 'consider the "Great Recession" and the subsequent near-collapse of public finances as a manifestation of a basic underlying tension in the political-economic configuration of advanced-capitalist societies.' The crisis, he argues, 'can only be fully understood in terms of the ongoing, inherently conflictual transformation of the social formation we call "democratic capitalism".'⁴⁰

In *Buying Time* and a series of accompanying papers, Streeck dissects these conflictual transformations along three interrelated dimensions: first, the *crisis sequence* that began in the late 1960s and that led from inflation to increases in public and then private debt; second, the parallel transformation of the capitalist state from a classical Schumpeterian tax state into what he calls a *debt state*, and from there into a *consolidation state*; and third, the impact of this set of transformations on the process of European integration and the institutional framework of the Eurozone in particular.⁴¹ The following section will briefly

38 Streeck 2009.

39 Streeck 2010a, p. 33.

40 Streeck 2011, p. 5.

41 Streeck 2014a.

discuss each of these in turn, aiming to identify both the merits and possible limitations of Streeck's analysis of the crisis.

2.1 *A Delayed Climax of the Crisis of the 1970s*

Streeck's first important move in *Buying Time* is to reintroduce the Marxian crisis theories he had been exposed to as a student in Frankfurt in the 1970s, arguing that 'the crisis weighing capitalism down at the beginning of the twenty-first century ... can be understood only as the climax of a development which began in the mid-1970s and which the crisis theories of that time were the first attempts to interpret.'⁴² Far from invalidated by the test of time, these theories were actually on to something very important, even if they could not foresee the various ways in which capital would seek to 'escape from the system of social regulation imposed on it against its will after 1945', and deflect the inevitable crisis of democratic capitalism through a set of temporary fixes that served to 'introduce resources into the distributional conflicts of the time that had not yet in fact been produced'.⁴³

This happened in three stages, each of them short-lived, and each in turn generating a new set of problems that then forced state administrators to change tack and find other solutions to keep the show on the road. In the first instance, the crisis of the 1970s was defused through an accommodating monetary policy, which allowed wages to rise faster than productivity growth, thus serving to 'safeguard social peace in a rapidly developing consumer society by compensating for inadequate economic growth and ensuring the continuation of full employment'.⁴⁴ The by-product of this monetary fix, however, was rising inflation. In the late 1970s, the US Federal Reserve responded to these concerns by hiking the prime interest rate to a peak of 21.5 per cent in an aggressive bid to suppress inflation. But the move towards 'sound money' came at a cost: the potential destabilisation of the postwar class compromise and the widening of the gap between popular expectations and the ability of capitalist markets and states to meet them. The need to bridge this gap prompted the second stage in the crisis sequence: the rise of the public debt.⁴⁵

From the early 1980s onwards, the turn to monetarist orthodoxy combined with the US-led liberalisation of domestic and international capital markets to greatly increase the profitability of finance and expand the availability of private credit. At the same time, the world's leading capitalist states – under

⁴² Streeck 2014a, p. 1.

⁴³ First quote from Streeck 2014a, p. 19; second quote from Streeck 2011.

⁴⁴ Streeck 2014a, pp. 32–3.

⁴⁵ Streeck 2014a, p. 34.

the leadership of Reagan and Thatcher – launched a concerted assault on the power of organised labour and its entrenched demand for full employment. While this dual offensive against the Keynesian welfare model risked undermining systemic legitimacy, the rapid growth of financial markets provided policymakers with an opportunity to defer the resultant distributional conflicts by mobilising credit – once again committing 'future' resources to current problems and deferring inevitable tax increases or budget cuts to some undefined time to come.⁴⁶

Just like the monetary fix of the late 1970s, however, this fiscal fix quickly ran out of steam, and by the early 1990s financial markets began to demand the consolidation of government budgets in the face of rising public indebtedness. Once again following the leadership of the US and UK governments, this time under Clinton and Blair, the advanced capitalist countries embarked upon a concerted effort to reduce government expenditure, privatise state assets and further liberalise capital markets. But as before, these moves came at a cost, threatening to depress aggregate demand and undermine systemic legitimacy by producing a fall in household income. Once again, the expansion of credit enabled them to introduce future resources into the matrix – this time shifting the emphasis from public borrowing to sustain welfare spending towards private borrowing to sustain consumption. This move hailed the emergence of what Colin Crouch has called 'privatised Keynesianism',⁴⁷ marked by a dramatic increase in the system's reliance on household debt to continue to meet established welfare expectations.

Taken together, these three fixes – inflation, public debt and private debt – served for a while to 'buy time' and 'postpone and extend the crisis of postwar democratic capitalism'.⁴⁸ But just as the first two fixes had exhausted themselves in the space of less than a decade, so the third fix produced a new set of problems that would eventually lead to its own exhaustion: in this case, the dangerous accumulation of bad household debt in the private banking system. The credit crunch of 2007 and subsequent Wall Street crash of 2008–9 thus marked the dramatic end of the private-debt fix and compelled states to intervene on an unprecedented scale by further indebting themselves to bail out their systemically important financial institutions – undoing all previous attempts at fiscal consolidation in the process.

This argument as laid out by Streeck is captivating and persuasive, but as he himself readily admits, not entirely original. Much of Streeck's analysis of

46 Streeck 2014a, p. 36.

47 Crouch 2009.

48 Streeck 2014a, p. xiv.

the liberalisation of the credit system, for one, was foreshadowed by Greta Krippner in her 2011 book, *Capitalizing on Crisis*, whose central thesis is that 'the turn to finance allowed the state to avoid a series of economic, social, and political dilemmas that confronted policymakers beginning in the late 1960s and 1970s, paradoxically preparing the ground for our own era of financial manias, panics, and crashes some three decades later.'⁴⁹ But while Krippner took the Marxist contributions on financialisation – especially those of Giovanni Arrighi and David Harvey – very seriously, such a critical engagement remains conspicuously absent in Streeck's account.⁵⁰ As we will see later on, this refusal to engage with contemporary Marxist theorising leads Streeck to embrace a rather one-sided understanding of capitalist development and crisis formation, which in turn has a number of important consequences for his vision of the future.

2.2 *The Fiscal Crisis and Restructuring of the State*

The second historical development that Streeck draws attention to in *Buying Time* – the thorough restructuring of the capitalist state since the 1970s – is arguably the most important *political* aspect in his treatment of the crisis. Streeck's understanding of the state and of crisis formation under late capitalism is distinctive in its foregrounding of the seemingly arcane subject of public finance, without which a proper understanding of the present moment would have been impossible. Not coincidentally, this is also an area where Streeck's own intellectual transformation most clearly comes to the fore. As late as 2007, Streeck had still summarily dismissed the most important postwar Marxist study of public finance – James O'Connor's *Fiscal Crisis of the State* – as 'often-cited but rarely read and indeed hardly readable'.⁵¹ Rejecting what he considered to be O'Connor's 'Marxist-functionalist' account, Streeck instead drew on his own historical-institutionalist approach to explain the fiscal crisis of the German state that had been building up since the 1980s.⁵² After 2008, however, O'Connor's influence becomes increasingly apparent in Streeck's writings. As a result, one of the main merits of O'Connor's work also becomes one of the main merits of Streeck's work: to refocus attention on the key question of how the capitalist state is financed, and the ways in which shifts in its sources of financing impact power relations, distributional conflicts and the state's capacity to legitimise itself.

49 Krippner 2011, p. 2.

50 Harvey 1982; Arrighi 1994.

51 O'Connor 1973.

52 Streeck 2007, pp. 5–6.

O'Connor had argued that the capitalist state has a dual nature that pulls it in opposite directions. On the one hand, its *legitimation* function compels it to respond to rising welfare expectations among the general population by raising public spending; on the other, its *accumulation* function keeps it from raising taxes sufficiently high to cover its growing budget outlays, resulting in a widening structural deficit. Over time, O'Connor theorised, this basic contradiction would give rise to a fiscal crisis of the state, threatening to undermine the viability of the capitalist system as a whole.⁵³ But while his analysis was widely influential at the time, O'Connor did not foresee the possibility of financialisation, which was to provide policymakers with a stopgap to the crisis: large-scale government borrowing. In other words, what O'Connor had failed to anticipate was the ability of capital and the state to play for time by drawing on an expanded credit supply to alleviate some of the intensifying social tensions of the time. One of the main merits of *Buying Time* is therefore to restore centrality to the question of the public debt in the political economy of contemporary capitalism.⁵⁴

For Streeck, the spectacular increase of public debt levels since the 1980s lauds 'a new stage in the relationship between capitalism and democracy'.⁵⁵ The defining characteristic of this new stage is the gradual transition, increasingly entrenched after 2008, from the classical Schumpeterian *tax state* into a neoliberal *debt state*, or a state 'which covers a large, possibly rising part of its expenditure through borrowing rather than taxation, thereby accumulating a debt mountain that it has to finance with an ever greater share of its revenue'.⁵⁶ For Streeck, the rise of the debt state is not merely a fiscal development; it should be seen 'both as a retarding factor in the crisis of the tax state and as the rise of a new political formation with its own laws'.⁵⁷ The key characteristic of this new political formation is the emergence of the state's private creditors, whom Streeck somewhat controversially refers to as the *Marktvolk*, or the people of the market, as a second constituency alongside the *Staatsvolk* of ordinary citizens.⁵⁸

By identifying this major shift in the sources of state financing, Streeck has put his finger on one of the defining and most contentious political issues of our time: the growing dependence of advanced capitalist states on private credit and the intensification of distributional conflict over the repayment of

53 O'Connor 1973.

54 Streeck 2013.

55 Streeck 2014a, p. 79.

56 Streeck 2014a, pp. 72–3.

57 Streeck 2014a, p. 73.

58 For a critique of the notion of the *Marktvolk*, see Tooze 2017.

the resultant debts. Nevertheless, despite the important contribution Streeck thereby makes to our understanding of the present crisis, his conceptualisation of this development is not entirely unproblematic. To begin with, one could question the historical validity of the claim that the debt state constitutes a *new* type of political formation. In a sense, the capitalist state has always been both a tax-*and*-debt state; indeed, the power to borrow was just as foundational to the emergence of the modern state system as the power of taxation. As Marx had already remarked in Volume I of *Capital*, the rise of the national debt 'marked with its stamp the capitalistic era'. Indeed, in his historical chapters on the emergence of modern capitalism, Marx explicitly highlights how the birth of the system of public credit served as 'one of the principal levers of primitive accumulation', allowing tax revenues to be turned into capital through the servicing of interest on government debt, thereby feeding into the rise of a distinct 'aristocracy of finance' and the emergence of the 'modern bankocracy'.⁵⁹ It would not be an exaggeration to claim that the institution of the public debt has remained foundational to the reproduction of capitalist power relations ever since, regularly giving rise to intense political contestation over the mounting burden of state obligations. It is no coincidence, in this respect, that distributional struggles over taxation and public-debt repayment were central to many of the defining political upheavals of the capitalist era, from the tumult of the *Ciampi* in late-medieval Florence and the Dutch Revolt against Habsburg Spain, to the Glorious Revolution in England and the American and French Revolutions a century later.⁶⁰

Instead of theorising the 'tax state' and the 'debt state' as conceptually distinct and mutually exclusive categories, it may therefore make more sense to consider the two as a contradictory unity of sorts, in which taxation and public borrowing stand in a dialectical relation with one another, and in which an increase in the latter (public debt) eventually necessitates an increase in the former (taxes). Indeed, historically, modern taxation largely developed in response to the need to repay government debts, often accumulated during times of war, and an effective tax system subsequently became a precondition for the latter's expansion, as risk-averse financiers would only extend credit to states that could credibly commit to raising sufficient revenue for the servicing of interest. Marx put this succinctly in *Capital*: '[a]s the national debt is backed by the revenues of the state, which must cover the annual interest payments,

59 Marx 1990, p. 919.

60 For a more extensive treatment of the contentious politics of sovereign debt, see Roos 2019.

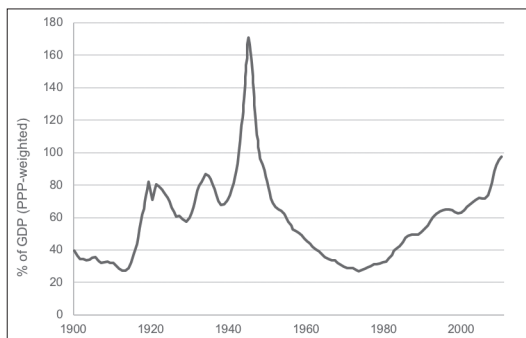


FIGURE 1 Gross government debt of advanced economies, 1900–2011
SOURCE: ABBAS, BLATTNER, DE BROEK, EL-GANAIFY AND HU 2014

etc., the modern system of taxation was the necessary complement of the system of national loans.⁶¹

These theoretical quibbles would be merely academic, were it not for their potentially far-reaching political implications. Since Streeck bases his conceptual framework on an inherent opposition between 'tax states' and 'debt states', an opposition rooted in a relatively narrow historical comparison that takes the 'tax states' of the *Trente Glorieuses* as its baseline, he ends up overstating the novelty of the current rise in public debt levels, thereby inadvertently providing ammunition to fiscally orthodox scholars who argue that state budgets urgently need to be consolidated to deal with these 'unprecedented' debt loads. As a matter of fact, the high public debt levels of the neoliberal era are by no means unprecedented – and nor do they necessarily need to be construed as a problem *per se*. The rapidly growing 'tax states' of the immediate postwar period actually had significantly higher debt-to-GDP ratios than their 'debt state' successors do today (Figure 1). The difference is that, after the war, these debts were largely inflated away through a policy of 'financial repression', whereas under neoliberalism the world's leading central banks have pursued the much more creditor-friendly monetary policy of quantitative easing combined with historically low interest rates.

Moreover, while heavily indebted states regularly defaulted on their foreign obligations prior to World War II, today there is an expectation that all debts must and will be repaid. What truly characterises the neoliberal era, then, is not the rise of the 'debt state' as a historically distinct political formation, but rather the shift away from sovereign default (prior to World War II) and

61 Marx 1990, p. 921.

financial repression (after World War II) to a widespread insistence on full repayment and low inflation in a context of relatively high public indebtedness. In sum, governments have long depended on private credit, but have historically used a variety of ways to deal with unsustainable debt loads. The current policy of austerity is only necessary insofar as sovereign default and inflationary monetary policy have been foreclosed as 'acceptable' alternatives.⁶²

Nevertheless, Streeck is entirely right to point out that *growing* state dependence on private credit has a number of important implications for democratic responsiveness. Most importantly, it endows the internationally mobile *Marktvolk* with expanded financial control over territorially bound national polities, allowing it to wield 'its political influence not only indirectly (by investing or not investing in national economies) but also directly (by financing or not financing the state itself)'.⁶³ Under neoliberal globalisation, restoring investor confidence therefore begins to take precedence over regaining public trust or popularity with voters; credit ratings and interest-rate spreads increasingly assume priority over the polls. The result, Streeck notes, is that, as the 'debt state' reaches its mature form, it increasingly begins to resemble 'a collection agency on behalf of a new global *haute finance*'.⁶⁴ In the process, 'capitalism is emptied of democracy'.⁶⁵

2.3 *Fiscal Consolidation and Democratic Insulation in Europe*

These developments have been particularly pronounced in Europe in the wake of the sovereign debt crisis, which brings us to the third important historical development analysed by Streeck in *Buying Time*: the growing creditor demands for fiscal consolidation and the extreme lengths to which state administrators are now willing to go in order to restore investor confidence in the ability of governments to repay their debts. These efforts are already leading to 'a deep restructuring of the international state system, especially in Europe, the heartland of the modern welfare state',⁶⁶ where concerted efforts by policymakers to reassure private creditors have given rise to a variety of national and transnational institutional arrangements aimed at enhancing the credibility of the member states' commitments to their financial obligations.⁶⁷ These changes are now giving rise to a transformation of the debt state into an internationalised *consolidation state*.

62 Again, for a more extensive treatment of this observation, see Roos 2019.

63 Streeck 2014a, p. 84.

64 Streeck 2012b, p. 16.

65 Streeck 2014a, p. 96.

66 Streeck 2014a, p. 45.

67 Streeck 2013, p. 15.

Although important questions remain on the exact typological nature of this consolidation state – it is not entirely clear, for instance, if it is merely a subtype of the supposed 'debt state', its fully developed form, a transitional institutional arrangement that will eventually recede once budgets are consolidated, or a whole new political formation operating according to a different set of laws – there is little doubt that Streeck has identified an important political dynamic in the post-2008 landscape: the 'growing financial market demands for a break in the trend towards ever higher public indebtedness' and for governments to 'return once and for all to fiscal solidity and sustainability'.⁶⁸ In this light, an established consolidation state 'is one that has managed to institutionalise a political commitment and build a political capacity never to default on its debt, projecting an uncompromising determination to place its obligations to its creditors over all other obligations.'⁶⁹

In the consolidation state, the shifting balance of power and long-standing conflict between the *Staatsvolk* and the *Marktvolk* is therefore decisively settled in favour of the latter. In order to regain investor confidence and ensure both balanced budgets and continued debt servicing, governments are compelled to impose unpopular austerity measures and neoliberal reforms – and to prevent voters from interfering with these consolidation efforts, state administrators universally resort to shielding policymaking from democratic pressures. 'In short', Streeck summarises, 'a consolidation state may be described as one whose commercial market obligations take precedence over its political citizenship obligations, where citizens lack access to political or ideological resources with which to contest this.'⁷⁰

As noted, this development has taken on its most extreme form in continental Europe in the wake of the Eurozone debt crisis, with the transformation of the Economic and Monetary Union (EMU) into an 'asymmetric fiscal stabilisation regime'⁷¹ and a 'mutual surveillance and control arrangement'⁷² held together by constitutionally binding balanced budget laws, international agreements like the Fiscal Pact, and the disciplinary role assumed by the European Central Bank and international financial institutions like the IMF. All of these elements serve to tie governments' hands and limit national sovereignty in order to ensure continued debt servicing in the face of growing popular opposition to austerity and neoliberal reform. One of the main purposes

68 Streeck 2015a, p. 10.

69 Streeck 2015a, p. 11.

70 Streeck 2015a, p. 12.

71 Streeck 2015a, p. 1.

72 Streeck 2015a, p. 16.

of the EMU's transformation into a 'European consolidation state', then, is to disempower voters and shield fiscal policy from democratic pressures: 'As an international regime not directly exposed to traditional class politics and popular democracy, the European consolidation state is in a better position than a nation state to impose on unreliable electorates a market-conforming fiscal policy, a policy of austerity, and the primacy of debt service over public services.'⁷³

Importantly, the rise of the European consolidation regime is part of a more long-term trend in the European integration process away from its Keynesian roots and towards an increasingly Hayekian order of interstate federalism. Streeck therefore refers to the EU as a 'liberalisation machine' pursuing the 'Hayekisation' of European capitalism. Functioning like a modern European equivalent of the gold standard, the fiscal and monetary straitjacket of the Eurozone is the very epitome of this development – leaving internal devaluation as the only remaining option to consolidate state budgets and adjust to the shock of the sovereign debt crisis. For Streeck, 'the purpose of the whole edifice, whose completion is drawing ever closer, is to depoliticise the economy while at the same time de-democratising politics', not least through the turn to technocracy as a 'government of experts'.⁷⁴

This critical reading of the EU and EMU has increasingly pushed Streeck towards what could be called a position of 'left-wing euroscepticism',⁷⁵ prompting him to call for a break-up of the single currency and the restoration of national sovereignty through the creation of a 'European Bretton Woods' regime, with the aim of safeguarding established democratic processes against the power of financial markets, the 'euro-imperialism' of the German government, and the unresponsive and unaccountable technocracy in Brussels and Frankfurt. These conclusions have in turn famously prompted cosmopolitan thinkers like Habermas to accuse Streeck of *Kleinstaatlichkeit*, or 'small-state nostalgia' – a charge the latter vehemently denies.⁷⁶ Instead, Streeck claims to side with the anti-globalisation movement against the utopian visions of liberal internationalists, European federalists and global governance enthusiasts:

As the sensible social democrat that I have long been, I concede with shocked astonishment that the really important questions today are those most likely to be discussed in the vicinity of movements like ATTAC:

73 Streeck 2015a, pp. 17, 20.

74 Streeck 2014a, pp. 114, 116–34.

75 Streeck 2014c.

76 Streeck 2016d.

questions about how globalisation might be re-tailored or even – *horribile dictum* – scaled back to become compatible with egalitarian democracy.⁷⁷

Nevertheless, as his proposal for a European Bretton Woods in the conclusion to *Buying Time* demonstrates, Streeck's writings do undeniably retain a certain wistful commitment to the basic contours of the postwar welfare state, which serves not only as a canvas against which to compare the recent transformations and crises of democratic capitalism, but also as a social and political ideal to which capitalism would ideally be made to conform again. Ironically, then, having just demonstrated the impossibility of reform through a compelling account of the breakdown of the postwar social model, Streeck now suddenly resurrects the same reformist solutions that he has just shown to be politically and economically unfeasible. Still, in spite of this somewhat anti-climactic conclusion, Streeck's sombre assessment of the prospects for democracy in Europe remains on point. The seemingly resilient class compromise that undergirded the postwar order of democratic capitalism is definitively coming undone, and it is not clear how much longer policymakers will be able to keep buying time through unconventional monetary policies. As Streeck concludes in *Buying Time*, 'the clock is ticking for democracy' – although 'it must remain an open question ... whether the clock is also ticking for capitalism'.⁷⁸

3 The End of Capitalism or the End of Democracy?

Only several years after these words first appeared in print, the future of capitalism no longer looks so open-ended to Streeck. In his recently published collection of essays – *How Will Capitalism End?* – he answers his own question with a decisive affirmative: yes, the clock *is* ticking for capitalism. We now find ourselves in a Gramscian interregnum, between an old world that is dying and a new one that cannot yet be born, with all kinds of pathological symptoms arising from the breach. The system has spun 'out of control: there is nobody anymore who could aspire to running it, no individual, no firm, no state, and no international organisation'.⁷⁹ As a result, society is 'devoid of coherent institutions capable of normalising the lives of its members and protecting them from accidents and monstrosities of all sorts', meaning social life will increasingly

⁷⁷ Streeck 2014d, p. 218.

⁷⁸ Streeck 2014a, p. 5.

⁷⁹ Streeck 2015b, p. 15.

be characterised by structural indeterminacy.⁸⁰ Still, despite this indeterminacy, Streeck is certain of this: capitalism has had its day. Undermined by the irreversible self-destructiveness of its own success, it is slowly coming undone. 'The image I have of the end of capitalism', he writes, 'an end that I believe is already under way – is one of a social system in chronic disrepair.'⁸¹

In these latest writings, Streeck presents a sweeping vision of the debilitating morbidities that have beset the advanced capitalist democracies in the decade since the global financial crisis. As I will argue, however, his conclusions about the ongoing demise of capitalism appear to rest on a number of questionable assumptions. In what follows, I develop a fourfold critique of Streeck's vision of the future: first, that he misconceptualises his object of study by building 'public benefits' into his definition of capitalism, which then leads him to the implausible conclusion that the system's failure to provide these public benefits in the wake of the Great Recession lauds the end of capitalism as such; second, that by focusing narrowly on the OECD countries in the post-1970s period, he predisposes his analysis towards a 'declinist' view of the capitalist world system that completely ignores its dynamic emerging centres of accumulation, most importantly China; third, that he fails to incorporate social struggles and anti-systemic movements into his analytical framework, foreclosing any constructive engagement with the type of popular contestation that may yet emerge as a countervailing force to the power of capital; and fourth, that, as a result, the only bulwark he can fall back onto is a thoroughly neoliberalised nation state that is now largely devoid of social and democratic content, leaving him with the reassertion of national borders as the only remaining bulwark against the further encroachment of destabilising external forces. When it comes to the question of immigration, this has in turn led Streeck to embrace a number of increasingly problematic views on the supposed threats posed by immigrants to the integrity of the Western welfare state.

3.1 *The Mandevillean Promise of Public Benefits*

The main theoretical problem that confronts Streeck in his latest book is to identify at what point a capitalist society ceases to be properly 'capitalist' in nature. This question, which goes to the heart of the *problématique* addressed in *How Will Capitalism End?*, is ultimately one of conceptualisation and how one chooses to define capitalism: what are its essential characteristics, and at what point are we justified in equating their disappearance with the end of the social order they once sustained? This is the slippery slope on which we have

80 Streeck 2016e, p. 169.

81 Streeck 2014f, p. 47.

to assess the validity of Streeck's main argument – which, as it turns out, appears to hinge on a relatively liberal definition of capitalism:

I propose that to determine if capitalism is alive, dying or dead, we define it as a modern society that secures its collective reproduction as an unintended side-effect of individually rational, competitive profit maximisation in pursuit of capital accumulation, through a 'labour process' combining privately owned capital with commodified labour power, *fulfilling the Mandevillean promise of private vices turning into public benefits*.⁸²

It is this latter italicised part – which defines guaranteed public benefits into the very essence of what capitalism is about – that is central to Streeck's argument. If we leave it out, there is no reason *a priori* to believe that capitalism is disappearing; indeed, as long as wage labour, private ownership of the means of production and the individually rational pursuit of profit through a capitalist production process continue to exist – and Streeck offers no reason to believe that they will not – we would still be living in a capitalist society, even if further capital accumulation fails to generate public benefits. Streeck's claim that capitalism is on its way out rests purely on the notion that it is no longer able to fulfil the Smithian or Mandevillean formula of social progress that he has just superimposed onto what is otherwise a Marxian definition of capitalism. The problem with this conceptual manoeuvre is not only that it reifies the neoclassical mystification of capital accumulation as a 'rising tide lifting all boats', so famously derided by Keynes as the 'the astounding belief that the most wickedest of men will do the most wickedest of things for the greatest good of everyone', but also that it directly contradicts Streeck's own understanding of the *exogenous* social containment that is required to keep the system's *endogenous* tendencies towards the concentration of wealth and power in check and make it work towards collectively beneficial ends instead.

In truth, capitalism has never fulfilled this promise on its own; it has only ever done so as a result of successful struggles over the length of the working day, the quality of everyday life, and the relative distribution of the surplus. As a result, Streeck's 'promise of boundless collective progress' is really only ever partially actualised under specific socio-political conditions and institutional arrangements – most successfully, perhaps, under the postwar class compromise of democratic capitalism. While 'positive externalities' from capitalist development are by no means impossible, they are also not guaranteed and

82 Streeck 2014f, p. 48 (emphasis added); see also Streeck 2016a.

certainly not an essential aspect of what the system is about. The definition Streeck now provides to make his case about the end of capitalism is in fact the definition of its *social-democratic* variant. As a result, what Streeck really appears to be describing in his new book is not so much the end of capitalism *tout court*, as the end of *democratic* capitalism. What he has really identified, then, is not the impending demise of the 'bourgeois' social order as such, but merely its growing incapacity to legitimise itself through the incorporation of organised labour, the semblance of democratic representation, and the guarantee of relatively egalitarian social outcomes (the transformation of private vices into public benefits).

Streeck himself recognises that the defining features of capitalism may well survive even in the absence of collectively beneficial outcomes: 'Under post-capitalism', he writes, 'private profit-making continues, even though in the shadow of uncertainty in an anomic society with decaying institutions, declining coherence, successive crises, and ongoing local and more-than-local conflicts and contestations.'⁸³ But if private profit-making and capitalist relations of production continue to exist in an increasingly anomic, crisis-ridden and conflictual setting, to what extent are we really justified in speaking of a *post-capitalist* interregnum? Are we not simply observing a 'regression' from the organised, egalitarian and supposedly democratic capitalism of the postwar years to the more disorganised, inequalitarian and anti-democratic capitalism of the nineteenth century; the kind of despotic, no-holds-barred, robber-baron bankocracy originally described by Marx in *Capital*? Streeck himself gives conflicting answers to this question, underlining an unresolved tension in his work in terms of the future direction of capitalist development.

In *Buying Time* and its accompanying papers, as we have seen, he argues that ever since the crisis of the 1970s capitalism has gradually been returning to its 'normal self', its 'true nature' or 'its essence', so that '*capitalism became progressively more capitalist*'.⁸⁴ In the essays assembled in his new book, however, he argues that capitalism – faced with 'a concatenation of intertwined, long-term trends' – has already had its day and is now in 'a continuous process of gradual decay, protracted but apparently all the more inexorable', ultimately bound to come to an ignominious end.⁸⁵ Yet these statements cannot both be true at the same time: either capitalism has been returning to its true nature, in which case we should expect it to continue to display the inherent dynamism it has long displayed after every structural crisis in the past; or it is undergoing

83 Streeck 2016e, p. 170.

84 Streeck 2010a, p. 33.

85 Streeck 2014f, p. 38.

a historically unique *terminal* crisis, which would require a convincing account of why the system's long-standing adaptive resilience has suddenly ceased to function and given way to irreversible decay, thus causing *capitalism to become progressively less capitalist*.

In defence of the argument that this time is different, Streeck now points to three interrelated 'morbidity' as symptomatic of capitalism's terminal decline: low growth, high inequality and rising debt.⁸⁶ But while these debilitating trends do underline the fact that capitalism has clearly lost much of the vitality that defined its postwar trajectory, they hardly constitute evidence of its ongoing demise. If anything, they show that the world faces a protracted period of increasingly stagnant, highly polarised and heavily indebted capitalism – an interregnum indeed, but hardly one lauding the end of the 'bourgeois' social order as such.

3.2 *A Limited Geographical and Historical Horizon*

If Streeck's emphasis on public benefits highlighted a conceptual problem flowing from his continued embrace of a neo-corporatist analytical framework, the same continuity appears to pose a methodological problem as well – one that has equally important consequences for Streeck's vision of the future. Crucially, the argument that capitalism has had its day appears to be based on a set of generalisations derived from a study of a narrow subgroup of cases within a relatively limited time horizon. By taking the postwar OECD countries as his comparative baseline and limiting himself to a study of the *moyenne durée* since the 1970s, Streeck primes himself towards a set of observations that almost exclusively hints at a process of economic decline, or at least secular stagnation. Placed in a broader geographical and historical perspective, however, a rather different picture emerges.

For one, the undeniable stagnation of the advanced capitalist democracies over the past decades has coincided with an unprecedented economic expansion in the East, centred on China, that would seem to directly contradict Streeck's observation of universal system-wide decline. Even though China's GDP growth has slowed down in the wake of the global financial crisis and its debt and inequality levels are fast approaching dangerous territory, the country's overall economic performance during the neoliberal era has been nothing short of revolutionary (Figure 2), with GDP-per-capita increasing over fifty-fold since 1980. More importantly, China is currently in the process of shifting its developmental trajectory away from that of a mere industrial exporter, dependent for its growth on Western consumption, towards that of a mature

86 Streeck 2014f, p. 35.

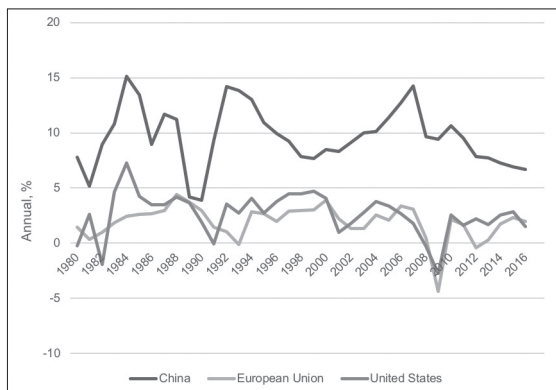


FIGURE 2 GDP growth, 1980–2016
SOURCE: WORLD BANK 2018

capitalist economy and a world-leading centre of productive consumption and foreign investment in its own right. As David Harvey notes, ‘one of the reasons that a troubled global capitalism survived as well as it did after 2007–8 was because of China’s sustained growth of productive consumption.’⁸⁷ Between 2011 and 2013, the country poured over 6,500 million tons of cement into its cities and countryside – an astonishing ‘45 percent more than the United States had consumed *in the whole of the preceding century*’.⁸⁸ The extremely ambitious Belt and Road Initiative furthermore hints at the transformative potential of a budding ‘Chinese century’: with infrastructural investments of up to \$900 billion in the wider region, the new silk road is poised to unleash a fresh wave of Chinese-led economic development across the Eurasian axis, and appears set to radically reshape the future of international trade – not to mention international finance and geopolitics.

Yet despite his stated methodological commitment to the study of capitalism as an ‘internationally variegated world system’, Streeck’s account systematically ignores China as an emerging centre of accumulation, clearly biasing his conclusions towards a ‘declinist’ view of global capitalism.⁸⁹ Here, Streeck could have taken a leaf out of the impressive books by Giovanni Arrighi, whose celebrated comparative-historical account of systemic cycles of accumulation, financialisation and hegemonic transition indirectly influenced Streeck’s own analysis in *Buying Time* (through the work of Greta Krippner). For Arrighi, the financial expansions of the past – centred on a Genoese-Iberian alliance in the

87 Harvey 2017.

88 Harvey 2017, pp. 176–83 (emphasis added).

89 Streeck 2010b, pp. 38–9.

mid-sixteenth century, on the Netherlands in the mid-eighteenth, and on the United Kingdom in the late-nineteenth – ‘culminated in fairly long periods of widespread systemic chaos’, during which the contours of a new systemic cycle, centred on a rising hegemonic power, slowly began to emerge from the fog of global disorder.⁹⁰ Just as today, such hegemonic transitions – or Gramscian ‘interregnums’ – also witnessed escalating domestic and international conflict, combined with the rise of revolutionary as well as reactionary counter-movements. A study of these prior periods of systemic chaos may therefore yield useful lessons for our present moment, including the observation that new global power constellations have historically tended to arise from within the interstices of the old – even if this was not always immediately apparent to contemporary observers at the time.⁹¹

In fact, seen from a long-term historical perspective, capitalism has repeatedly managed to face down Streeck’s ‘multi-morbidities’ of low growth, high debt and rising inequality, as well as the thoroughly destabilising social and political consequences they have wrought, by shifting gears and kick-starting a new material expansion of the world economy centred on a rising hegemonic power. From the ‘general crisis’ of the seventeenth century and the ‘revolutionary crisis’ of the late-eighteenth, to the catastrophic impact of the Great Depression and the two World Wars of the twentieth, capitalism has in the past proved itself capable of overcoming adversities considerably greater than those it faces today (with the obvious exception of climate change and ecological destruction, which strangely do not really feature in Streeck’s narrative at all). Far from leading to a catastrophic breakdown of the system, as many millenarian thinkers actively prophesied throughout each of these prior periods of global disorder, partial disintegration actually provided an impetus for the system’s restructuring and renewal. As Marx already noted in Volume 3 of *Capital*, ‘crises are never more than momentary, violent solutions for the existing contradictions, violent eruptions that re-establish the disturbed balance for the time being.’⁹² Historically, this insight appears to have held as much for individual financial crises as it has for the type of hegemonic transitions analysed by Arrighi. It is not entirely clear from Streeck’s geographically and historically delimited analysis why this time would be any different.

90 Silver and Arrighi 2011, p. 59.

91 Arrighi and Silver 1999.

92 Marx 1991, p. 357.

3.3 *The Absence of Social Movements and Political Opposition*

If conceptual and methodological choices led Streeck to embrace the non-sequitur that capitalism is now coming undone, a further theoretical choice leads him to the implausible conclusion that this process of systemic disintegration will largely go uncontested from below. This brings us to what is arguably the most striking lacuna in Streeck's account of capitalist collapse: the near-complete absence of social movements or political opposition from his analytical framework. This is not just an issue of *How Will Capitalism End?*; it is a theoretical omission that was already apparent in the singular emphasis on the agency of capital in *Buying Time*. In Streeck's story, capital effectively assumes the role of a prime mover – albeit one that, instead of generating orderly motion as in Aristotle, produces endless and intensifying *disorder* on a global scale. In the absence of any internal divisions or counter-movements impinging upon it, it is capital that moves everything – without ever being moved by anything but itself. In short, the agency of capital is theorised to be of an internally coherent and fully autonomous yet purely destituent nature, while the broader social universe lacks any apparent countervailing force, collective agency or constituent potential. As Kees Van der Pijl put it in a review of *Buying Time*, 'because ultimately capital as agency appears to stand outside its own field of operation and thus retains an ability to "try" different solutions, the notion of class struggle remains underdeveloped in this otherwise important book.'⁹³

This is not an unintentional oversight, either; it is actively integrated into Streeck's analytical framework as one of the logical consequences of capitalist development since the 1970s.⁹⁴ For Streeck, the 'social structure' of globalised and financialised capitalism 'confounds rather than supports class consciousness and collective action, leaving capitalism, not just without an alternative, but also without a prospect for progress.'⁹⁵ In other words, 'disorganised capitalism is disorganising not only itself but its opposition as well.'⁹⁶ At the same time, the moral order of late capitalism – with its 'possessive individualism' and its depoliticised culture of consumerism – militates strongly against social solidarity and political activism. As a result, Streeck argues, 'effective political counter-movements that would be up to the dimension of the problem are nowhere in sight.'⁹⁷

93 Van der Pijl 2015.

94 Streeck 2016a.

95 Streeck 2014f.

96 Streeck 2014f, p. 48.

97 Streeck 2014e, p. 80.

These are clearly remarkable statements in light of the wave of popular mobilisations that emerged in the wake of the global financial crisis. In many respects, the developments that Streeck so convincingly dissected in *Buying Time* have in recent years given rise to a *re-politicisation* of international finance, fiscal policy, foreign trade, corporate taxation and global capitalism more generally. A recent open letter on the Nuit Debout movement in France that was co-signed by Streeck and published in *Le Monde* recognised as much, noting that 'future historians delving into our era will doubtless say that it was particularly rich in social and political movements.'⁹⁸ Clearly these movements are not without their shortcomings, and for the moment a large gap remains between their emancipatory ambitions and their capacity to actually challenge the established order. It is one thing, however, to note the weaknesses of contemporary movements; it is quite another to simply dismiss them as 'anarchistic', 'Luddite', 'local', 'dispersed', 'uncoordinated' and even 'primitive'.⁹⁹ Such denouncements are particularly striking in light of Streeck's limited familiarity with contemporary struggles. When he was personally asked about Occupy Wall Street and the Spanish *indignados* in an interview, he was forced to admit that 'I know too little about such movements.'¹⁰⁰ Social struggles thus become – or rather remain – an important blind-spot in Streeck's recent thinking. Certainly neither Marx nor Polanyi would have approved of such a one-sided view of social change!

In a word, Streeck's latest book presents a dramatic vision of capitalist collapse, but one that nevertheless remains perilously unmoored from any emancipatory horizon – foreclosing any meaningful engagement with the type of social forces that may yet emerge to counter and overcome, or at the very least to contain, the further encroachment of capital in the years and decades to come. At times, wading through Streeck's fatalistic account of the future feels like reading Polanyi without the countermovement; Marx without class struggle; Gramsci without the optimism of the will. In the end, his reluctance to move beyond the ontological comfort zone of a collapsed social-democratic horizon leaves a void at the heart of his analysis that, in the absence of an emancipatory project or a progressive post-capitalist horizon, risks inducing political complacency.

98 Ali, Bantigny, Durand, Dorlin, Ernaux, Friot, Keucheyan, Kouvelakis, Lordon, Panitch and Streeck 2016.

99 Streeck 2014f, p. 48.

100 Streeck 2012c.

3.4 *National Borders as a 'Last Line of Defence'*

In recent years, Streeck has increasingly been tempted to fill this void with a reassertion of national borders as the last-remaining expression of 'organised' political control against the 'destabilising' external forces impinging upon it – irrespective of whether these are flows of 'hot money' or actual people fleeing poverty and war.¹⁰¹ These calls for stricter border control in turn hinge on a rather one-dimensional and underdeveloped theorisation of the impact of globalisation on the international border regime. In contrast, for instance, to the nuanced work by Saskia Sassen or Mezzadra and Neilson, who carefully highlight the differential impacts of globalisation on borders, strengthening them in some respects while weakening them in others, Streeck still conceives of globalisation in somewhat 'old-fashioned' 1990s terms as rendering national borders increasingly obsolete across the board.¹⁰²

This simplified view in turn blinds him to the many ways in which borders, far from having become irrelevant under neoliberal globalisation, have in fact *proliferated* and become an increasingly important tool for Western policy-makers to manage and control the unintended side-effects of increased global capital mobility. It is by no means a coincidence, in this respect, that the opening of borders to international trade and capital flows over the past three decades has gone hand in hand with an explosive construction of border walls to keep out unwanted migrants and refugees: while there were only 15 such reinforced physical boundaries in the world when the Berlin Wall came down in 1989, today there are nearly 70.¹⁰³ It is similarly no coincidence that Barack Obama – a cosmopolitan neoliberal globalisation advocate if ever there was one – presided over a record number of deportations of irregular migrants, earning him the nickname of 'deporter-in-chief'.¹⁰⁴ Nor should we be surprised that the creation of an internally 'borderless' European Union following the Maastricht Treaty and the Schengen Agreement has gone hand in hand with the construction of a 'Fortress Europe' for those seeking refuge in the EU from the outside. As Guy Verhofstadt, leader of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats in the European Parliament, recently tweeted: 'We need to better protect our external borders to keep our internal EU borders open.'

101 See, notably, Streeck 2017.

102 See, for instance, the following: 'Generally, in an era of "globalization", governments are coming under pressure to open up their countries, rendering national state borders economically and politically irrelevant' (Streeck 2016g, p. 74). Cf. Sassen 2006; Mezzadra and Neilson 2013.

103 Flores 2017. For more on the subject of globalisation and border walls, see Jones 2012.

104 Marshall 2016.

In reality, the impact of globalisation on the international border regime has been highly uneven. Although the old geographical limits imposed by national boundaries have become increasingly irrelevant to global capital in recent decades, they have also – especially in the wake of 9/11 – become increasingly restrictive and increasingly policed for the vast majority of non-Western poor. Streeck's account generally fails to integrate this unequal distribution of benefits and privileges into his analytical framework. As a result, while he remains at pains to dispel recurring accusations of 'small-state nostalgia', his writings do at times appear to betray a somewhat discomfiting sense of hostility, or at least apprehension, towards 'the international' in general – as exemplified by a recent opinion piece in *Die Zeit*, in which he approvingly cites Theresa May's nativist broadside that 'a citizen of the world is a citizen of nowhere'.¹⁰⁵ Streeck has made relatively little effort in this respect to differentiate between international *capital* mobility, which arguably lies at the root of the present disorder, and international *labour* mobility and refugee movements, which are to a large extent driven by the wars or socio-economic inequities wrought by that disorder. Indeed, in some of his most recent writings, Streeck has increasingly begun to argue against the latter as if they constitute the equivalent of the former.¹⁰⁶

Just as in *Buying Time*, where Streeck construed the embrace of international capital mobility and credit-market liberalisation as a conscious short-term 'fix' pursued by capital and the state, which in turn had a set of unintended negative consequences for society as a whole, so he now construes immigration and international labour mobility as a similar top-down capitalist strategy in response to narrow labour-market concerns. The migration of Polish workers to Britain, for instance, is presented as a 'response to longstanding skill deficits among the domestic workforce, due to under-investment in education, and generally to pressure British workers, in particular at the lower end of the wage scale, to become more "competitive"'.¹⁰⁷ The German response to the 'refugee crisis' of 2015 is depicted in much the same light, as an attempt by

105 Streeck 2018.

106 This tendency to conflate global capitalism with international migration, or at least to treat the two as comparable threats to Western welfare states, is clearly expressed in the following quote: '[T]raditionally in political economy, the Left favored regulation as a defense against the uncertainties of free markets, whereas deregulation was sought by the Right, especially since "globalization". By fighting for deregulation of national borders to allow for open and open-ended immigration, the Left abandons a central element of its historical pro-regulation agenda, which importantly involved restricting the supply of labor in order to limit competition in labor markets' (Streeck 2017, p. 3).

107 Streeck 2016f, p. 1.

the Merkel government to deal with the 'German economy's chronic hunger for labour, in particular the fear among German employers of labour-supply bottlenecks driving up wages or forcing relocation of production abroad in defence of international market share'.¹⁰⁸

This one-sided account of international migration is problematic on at least two counts. First, it largely effaces the agency of migrant workers and refugees themselves, presenting their decision to seek a better future elsewhere as driven purely by the interests of employers and policymakers in the West. While there is an element of truth in this portrayal (for as long as the capitalist regime of wage-labour persists, workers will always be objectified as variable capital and forced to move around in order to survive or thrive in an increasingly integrated labour market), it is clearly not the whole truth. David Harvey rightly identifies the contradictory nature of international labour mobility in this respect. On the one hand, he notes in *Limits to Capital*, '[t]he more mobile the labourer, the more easily capital can adopt new labour processes and take advantage of superior locations. The free geographical mobility of labour power appears as a necessary condition for the accumulation of capital.' On the other hand, however, 'workers are more than mere objects for capital. Geographical mobility has quite a different meaning for them: it represents the possibility of escape from tyranny and oppression, including that visited on labour by capital.'¹⁰⁹ This contradictory nature of international labour mobility – at once a source of capitalist flexibility and a potential line of flight from capitalist and imperialist predation – does not come out clearly enough in Streeck's narrative. Indeed, insofar as his recent writings on immigration ascribe any strategic capacity to migrants and refugees at all, they tend to locate it exclusively in the opportunistic attempt to deceive Western customs and immigration officials and exploit domestic welfare benefits.¹¹⁰

The second problem, closely related to the first, is that Streeck's account ends up stripping foreign workers of their status as fellow workers, treating class in narrowly national terms and throwing up a stark divide between the interests of 'indigenous' workers on the one hand, and the interests of migrants and refugees on the other. Taken together, these two moves do not only end up obscuring the common interests shared by these groups (in higher wages and increased public spending on education, healthcare and social housing,

108 Streeck 2016f, p. 2; see also Streeck 2016c.

109 Harvey 1982, pp. 381–5.

110 This interpretation is particularly evident in the discussion on 'migrants as strategic actors', which exclusively deals with the various ways in which migrants and refugees seek to get around or make strategic use of domestic laws in order to game the system (Streeck 2017, pp. 11–15).

for instance); they also reinforce a narrative that considers migrants and refugees as mere extensions of the class interests of international capital – and, as such, an existential threat to the integrity of the European welfare state. In the process, Streeck ends up lending legitimacy to the 'national-populist' view that immigration, by exerting downward pressure on wages and placing unbearable strains on national welfare systems, constitutes a direct threat to the interests of 'indigenous' workers.¹¹¹ This is a potentially dangerous claim for which there is no convincing evidence. Indeed, research on Germany, the United Kingdom and the United States has demonstrated that in all of these countries immigrants actually bring in more in taxes than they take out in benefits, meaning immigrants, on the whole, far from undermining the integrity of the Western welfare state, actively fund its redistributive policies.¹¹² Moreover, as Tansel and Turner point out with respect to Streeck's unsubstantiated claims about immigration lowering wages:

111 These presumptions, often backed with little more than anecdotal evidence from tendentious media reports, come out clearly in the following passage: 'A frequent misunderstanding is that rich societies must find it easier than poor ones to accommodate large numbers of immigrants. Most rich countries still operate elaborate welfare states and are committed to eradicating poverty and providing for a relatively egalitarian income distribution. Although immigrants might be happy to live well below local minimum standards, receiving countries tend to be reluctant to allow them to bring their poverty with them (although employers will sooner or later ask for abolishing or lowering local minimum wages). For this immigrants need to get social assistance, job training, housing, language courses, schooling for their children etc. All of this presupposes bureaucratic registration and identification for individual determination of needs and entitlements. It also requires disciplined compliance with legal procedures on the part of the immigrants themselves. This alone limits the number of immigrants that even the richest country can take in during a given period of time, unless it was willing to accept, for an uncertain duration, a steep increase in poverty, inequality and welfare dependence, an intensification of market pressures at the lower end of the income scale, and a decline in public safety' (Streeck 2017, pp. 6–7).

112 'A new study in Germany has found that, contrary to public perceptions, immigrants are not a strain on public finances, but bring in almost €22bn (£17.5bn) a year' (Huggler 2014; based on research by Bonin 2014 for the Centre for European Economic Research, ZEW); 'European immigrants to the UK paid much more in taxes than they received in benefits over the past decade, making a net fiscal contribution of £20bn, say researchers' (Warren 2014; based on research by Dustmann and Frattini 2014); 'A new working paper from the National Bureau of Economic Research [<https://www.nber.org/digest/aug17/w23498.shtml>] shows refugees [in the US] provide a net contribution to the economy through the taxes they pay over time, countering the notion that they are a drag on the economy due to a reliance on social benefits' (Da Costa 2017; based on research by Evans and Fitzgerald 2017).

... comprehensive reviews on the subject suggest that ‘there is still little evidence of an overall negative impact on jobs or wages’ in the UK. Coupled with the findings of a state-of-the-art research project on asylum seekers which concluded that ‘no clear correlation [exists] between access to the labour market and the number of asylum applications a country received’, it is clear that ‘economic’ arguments against immigration and accepting refugees should be examined under extreme scrutiny.¹¹³

And yet, ever since the so-called ‘refugee crisis’ of 2015 and the Brexit vote and election of Donald Trump in 2016, immigration policy has increasingly become the stick with which Streeck continues to flog the dead horse of the cosmopolitan centre-left. In a 2017 essay for the Danish Centre for Welfare Studies, he even goes so far as to hold immigrant children – as opposed to government cutbacks on education spending – responsible for crowding public schools (so that “white” parents ... will find ways to send their children to schools where they learn the national language properly’), just as he construes immigration as a leading cause of urban segregation, contributing to “white flight” from areas where immigrants cluster’, instead of seeing immigrant neighbourhoods as ethnically diverse working-class communities in their own right, which are often on the front-line of the financialisation-driven process of gentrification and among the first to suffer from austerity.¹¹⁴ Elsewhere, in a recent contribution to the social-democratic journal *Juncture*, he takes the argument even further, directly reproducing the Islamophobic trope that ‘mass migration’ leads to terrorism:

One result of [the migration of foreign workers and refugees] is another migration – the migration of the violence that is destroying the stateless societies of the periphery into the metropolis, in the form of ‘terrorism’

113 Tansel and Turner 2016. For further data on the impact of immigration on wages, see Wadsworth, Dhingra, Ottaviano and Van Reenen 2016; Mayblin and James 2016.

114 Streeck 2017, p. 8. The full quote is as follows: ‘[M]ass immigration tends to give rise to segregation, by ethnicity and class. As immigrant children crowd inner-city public schools, “white” parents, especially of the educated middle class and regardless of how welcoming they may otherwise be, will find ways to send their children to schools where they learn the national language properly. Similar developments are under way in housing markets, with “white flight” from areas where immigrants cluster. The result may be another line of conflict, between “nativist” defenders of what they consider their old rights to material support and cultural comfort, and the advocates, in politics and the liberal public, of new and sometimes, at least for the time being, superior rights for the victims of war and persecution.’

wrought by a new class of 'primitive rebels' that lacks any vision of a practically possible progressive future.¹¹⁵

Again, as with the notion that immigration lowers wages and welfare provisions, there is little empirical evidence for the claim that it leads to greater terrorist violence. Indeed, notwithstanding a number of high-profile, high-mortality attacks in recent years (most notably those in France in 2015 and 2016), the moving average of victims from terrorist violence in Western Europe decreased sharply during the supposed era of 'open borders' since the 1990s compared to the bloody autumn days of Streeck's idealised welfare state in the 1970s.¹¹⁶ Moreover, the vast majority of terrorist attacks in Europe continue to be committed not by immigrants or refugees with religious-fundamentalist motives, but by European citizens with ethno-nationalist or separatist motives.¹¹⁷

Beyond the liberty he takes with the facts, however, the real irony is that Streeck's own analysis as laid out in *How Will Capitalism End?* is characterised precisely by such a 'lack of any vision of a practically possible progressive future' that he attributes here to immigrant 'primitive rebels'. Moreover, it seems to be his own incapacity to imagine a feasible egalitarian alternative beyond the current 'post-capitalist' interregnum that is now driving Streeck to join a growing chorus of disillusioned social democrats in responding to the neoliberal pressures on what remains of the European welfare state by jealously guarding its last-remaining crumbs from the claims made upon it by migrant workers and their families. It is a development that has, on occasion, seen Streeck's views on immigration and refugee policy veer dangerously close to the welfare chauvinism of the nationalist right.¹¹⁸

115 Streeck 2016g, p. 73.

116 See the graph in Kirkegaard 2016.

117 Crone, Falkentoft and Tammikko 2017; Europol 2017. A report by the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights notes that 'There is little evidence ... that terrorists take advantage of refugee flows to carry out acts of terrorism or that refugees are somehow more prone to radicalization than others, and research shows that very few refugees have actually carried out acts of terrorism. As noted by a representative of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), "there is a clear perception in some quarters that asylum is misused to hide or provide safe haven for terrorists. Such perceptions are analytically and statistically unfounded, and must change". In its 2016 European Union Terrorism Situation and Trend Report, Europol also noted that there was no evidence that terrorists were systematically using refugee flows to enter Europe' (UN 2016).

118 Streeck himself, of course, would vehemently deny such accusations, as he has done on a number of occasions in recent years. Yet it is becoming increasingly difficult to square these self-exonerations with some of the strange fights he has decided to pick in his latest

Conclusion: Towards Radical New Horizons

In sum, the value of Streeck's recent work and the contribution it makes to our understanding of the present crisis is therefore somewhat ambivalent. On the one hand, Streeck provides a captivating and insightful account of the structural dynamics behind the demise of social democracy. The interpretative framework presented in *Buying Time* is as riveting as it is persuasive; as a result, it has rightly contributed to refocusing the left's attention on the crucial role played by rising public debt levels in undermining the postwar class compromise of democratic capitalism. On the other hand, however, Streeck's reading of the current conjuncture generally fails to draw his increasingly radical critique of the inherent incompatibility between capitalism and democracy to its logical conclusion. To expand on Ronzoni's metaphor at the start of this article, it is as if Streeck stares deep into the abyss of structural indeterminacy, wondering whether or not to jump and become a radical anti-capitalist – only to finally back away from the precipice and remain awkwardly poised on the hallowed ground of social democracy that is fast disappearing beneath his feet, increasingly tempted to hold himself in balance by clinging to national borders as a last line of defence against the further encroachment of destabilising external forces.

As I have argued, a specific set of conceptual, methodological and theoretical choices – flowing logically from the corporatist residue in his work – prime Streeck towards an understanding of contemporary capitalism as fundamentally devoid of social opposition or adaptive resilience, leading him to describe a world in which the inevitability of generalised anomie is structurally predetermined by the system's endogenous tendencies towards social entropy. Not only does this reading belie the historically recurring and ever-surprising ingenuity of capitalism as a political-economic system, or the actuality of popular resistance and the potentialities of countervailing forces within, against and beyond it; it also directly contradicts Streeck's own conceptualisation of capitalism as an inherently dynamic, globally variegated and thoroughly conflictual social order subject to growing indeterminacy on all fronts. To draw his increasingly radical critique of capitalism to its logical conclusions, then, the emancipatory void at the heart of Streeck's analytical framework would

writings. At one point, for instance, he explicitly defends xenophobia, or 'fear of strangers' [i.e. foreigners], as morally unproblematic and a potentially 'reasonable' precaution: 'Going by the Greek roots of the word [xenophobia] should mean "fear of strangers" – which does not as such seem morally reprehensible and may even be reasonable as a precaution' (Streeck 2017, p. 4).

need to be filled with a compelling vision of a truly democratic alternative to the current capitalist disorder. It is precisely here that Streeck falters. In the final analysis, his political and scholarly evolution of the past decade involves not so much a dynamic radicalisation of his past ideas as their static *inversion*: after the crisis, social-democratic optimism becomes post-democratic pessimism; 'wishful thinking' about the compatibility of capitalism and democracy becomes a dogged insistence on their inherent incompatibility; the unquestioning faith in gradual progress becomes the absolute certainty of irreversible decline.

In this respect, Streeck's latest book shares an undeniable affinity with a long-standing tradition of catastrophist theorising on the left – except that it deprives such deterministic readings of capitalist collapse of their emancipatory kernel, so that all that remains of the old choice between socialism and barbarism is the inevitability of the latter. If Streeck ultimately fails to provide 'any vision of a practically possible progressive future', the reason for this is simple: while he may have performed a 180° turn in his views on the viability of social democracy, politically he remains largely in the same place. After a long and winding intellectual trajectory, his recent work provides us with what is arguably the best guide we have to the disintegration of the postwar class compromise. But if the twenty-first-century left is to mount a serious challenge to the untrammelled power of capital and put this deep-seated capitalist crisis to productive and emancipatory ends, it will need to move far beyond the catastrophism inherent in Streeck's post-corporatist *Weltanschauung* and begin moving towards radical new horizons. However tempting the idea may seem, capitalism is unlikely to disappear of its own accord anytime soon. Its final crisis, a wise man once said, will be the one from which we do not allow it to emerge.

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