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EDITORIAL

Slovenia attracted considerable academic attention during the European enlargement process. Whether for its Yugoslav self-management past, social dialogue, involvement of the state in the economy, or relatively significant domestic factions of capital, the country has often been seen as an exception on the Eastern European periphery. The most influential conceptual tool for thinking about the characteristics and dynamics of capitalism's trajectory in Slovenia emerged from the second generation of comparative institutionalist debates, viewing Slovenia as a case of (exceptional) neocorporatism. Yet, the start of the 2008 global financial crisis saw most of the (claimed) achievements or the outlying characteristics of the Slovenian institutional set-up either vanish or be substantially attenuated and/or transformed: tripartite bargaining exists only as an institutional frame with limited content, the state has stepped back and left the European actors to decide on the key economic issues, while most of the domestically owned enterprises either went bankrupt or were sold to foreign capital.

Despite major transformations of the Slovenian state and economy in the last decade, there has been no major rethinking of the dominant conceptual tools. In fact, Slovenia has practically disappeared from politico-economic debates as a case study these days, with the small exception of studies on industrial relations. Still, one should not think that no research on the country's post-2008 crisis development has been produced recently. Quite a lively debate among domestic scholars can be found that offers fresh insights into the political, economic and institutional dynamics of Slovenia. This newer research has nevertheless hardly resonated in the international scholarly community. In fact, the neocorporatist framework generally continues to be the main perspective for understanding Slovenia, despite considerable advances in international and comparative political economy.

The thematic section entitled *Rethinking Slovenia's exceptionalism: Behind, within and beyond the neocorporatist framework* aims to 'liberate' Slovenia from being confined within an institutionalist neocorporatist *problématique* and return the country to the international research community's agenda. The section brings six articles together from diverse disciplinary backgrounds that not only rethink the changes, breaks and continuities in Slovenia's economic, social

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and political development, but also offer insights into its behind-the-scenes contradictory dynamics, while proposing new theoretical horizons for analysing the capitalist trajectory in Slovenia.

Ana Podvršič presents an overview of studies on Slovenia to understand why Slovenia has lost its analytical appeal as a research case study following the 2008 global financial crisis (GFC). She argues the country's initial heterodox development made Slovenia an attractive case study for exploring possible institutional alternatives to radical neoliberalisation. After the tripartite bargaining became exhausted as well as the significant post-GFC wave of privatisation, Slovenia lost its appeal among scholars concentrating on export-led economies dependent on foreign capital. In addition, while the debates today remain focused on questions of stability and continuity, Slovenia's more recent trajectory has been characterised by a prolonged economic and financial crisis and ongoing political instability.

The following three articles return to the discussions on Slovenia's neocorporatism but analyse its dynamics and contradictions from fresh theoretical angles. Considerably influenced by studies on (Slovenia's) industrial relations, the great majority of analyses of the country's neocorporatism under-theorised the crucial role of the state and political parties. Marko Hočevar highlights the thus far overlooked element in analysis of Slovenia's neocorporatism prior to the 2008 crisis. He focuses on the neocorporatist institutional arrangements and interests and goals of the dominant social bloc(s) in Slovenia. Strategic documents of the state are analysed since they were particular emanations of the interests and visions of the political-economic-bureaucracy and emerging-capitalist-class nexus, which were formed and adopted before the tripartite negotiations. His analysis shows that beyond the neocorporatist structure and certain neo-Keynesian policies as the outcome of the social partnership, a very strong orientation to implement greater liberalisation in the areas of employment and social policy was present well before 2004 or 2008.

Joachim Becker analyses the role of political parties in the rise, consolidation and contestation of neocorporatism in Slovenia and Austria. He argues that the type of connections between the political parties, on one hand, and the representatives of labour and capital, on the other, are strongly shaping the phase of erosion and contestation of neocorporatism. The firm links between business and the *Österreichische Volkspartei* slowed the erosion of neocorporatism in Austria. In Slovenia, however, no organic links developed between the parties and the representatives of labour and/or capital. Neocorporatism in Slovenia was consequently substantially more weakened, especially given the lack of links between parties and business organisations.

Maja Breznik and Majda Hrženjak analyse the crisis of the welfare state in Slovenia and its connections to the crisis of neocorporatism. They argue the two crises are interconnected and deeply embedded in the international system of national welfare provisions and transnational care inequalities. Since the early 1990s, greater private investment has been made in the country's welfare state,

with the expectation it would improve the quality of services. However, private capital has transformed the sector's operating logic, making it more profit-driven. The influence of the social partners, especially the trade unions, on the welfare state has thus faded considerably, at the same time as Slovenia (a semi-peripheral state) faces growing pressures toward the familisation of care driven by workforce shortages and the retrenchment of public services.

The last two contributions in the thematic bloc open new research avenues for studying the development of peripheral capitalism in Slovenia, moving behind and beyond the neocorporatist framework. The consideration of Slovenia as an Eastern European neocorporatist exception has often come with a normative appreciation of the country's transition having been "better, smoother, and socially equal". Nina Vodopivec goes behind such a positive macroeconomic generalisation to emphasise the everyday experiences of (female) workers. Her long-term ethnographic and historical research focuses in particular on the closure of the Mura textile factory, and traces how the material and symbolic impoverishment of the workers' experiences have been interpreted, silenced or delegitimised in public discourse. She argues the workers' loss represented a dispossession, i.e., a form of structural violence that stripped them of their livelihoods, political agency, and the material foundations of their lives built during the time of self-management.

Jaša Veselinovič focuses on Slovenia's growth model, its export dependency, and the specific political and economic elite agency in attempting to balance between the country's EU and NATO membership and the importance of exporting to new markets. He shows that in recent years, even though this is a contested and contradictory process, Slovenia has shifted to greater collaboration with China and especially views it as a possible economic partner due to the struggles of the EU's, notably Germany's, industrial sector.

The political and economic developments, ruptures and changes over the last few decades have been very significant. The possible shift of the EU in the global division of labour, its economic stagnation and technological lag behind the USA and China, already entail changes in the institutional frameworks, political configurations and organisation of capital accumulation underpinning the development patterns of European countries. It is most likely that these changes will also reshape the power relations between different factions of labour, capital and the state, within and between the countries. The current dynamics of the capitalist economy along with the technological, economic and political shifts and continuities also require different theoretical frameworks for understanding how capitalism is evolving and transforming, notably in countries on the periphery that have always been put under greater pressure in times of crises. It is our hope that the following articles will trigger new discussions on ways to understand not simply the case of Slovenia, but also more broadly the development of peripheral capitalism.