

# Historical Materialism Seventeenth Annual Conference

Survival Pending Revolution: Historical Materialism in a Pandemic Age

12th-15th November 2020

## Call for Papers

**Deadline for abstracts: 8 June 2020**

The editorial board of Historical Materialism recognises that the ongoing pandemic has rendered all planning uncertain. It is by no means guaranteed that universities in the UK and elsewhere will be open as usual in the Autumn term, nor can we calculate the personal, financial and material toll of the current public health emergency on comrades' ability to participate in the conference. We recognise, however, that the conference has become an important point of reference, and a kind of community, for many of us, and hope to be able to hold it in some form. We thus remain flexible in terms of the dates and modality of the conference (for instance, enabling more distanced participation than in the past) and will continuously review the situation and communicate with the HM community.

It is a commonplace in the left's theoretical imaginary that crises have a revelatory function, as hitherto repressed antagonisms and marginalised contradictions come to the fore. With everyday life across most of the planet in conditions of sequester and the circuits of capital rudely halted by the SARS-CoV2/Covid-19 pandemic, the secular damage to social reproduction and human survival wreaked by predatory austerity regimes is daily manifest in harrowing reports from the clinical frontlines. Society's reliance on the reproductive and repressive capacities of the state is writ large, yet shadowed by the often malevolent incompetence of capitalist governments, as well as the rich opportunities for the consolidation of authoritarianism offered by a global public health emergency. At the same time, many of the social implications of the pandemic – implicating mobility, access to health and social care – long pre-existed the outbreak, as a long tradition of disability studies and struggles has demonstrated. From the sudden discovery of the social centrality of precarious and proletarianized care and service work to the sudden irruption of prisons into public consciousness, from the recrudescence of xenophobic fantasies to the emergence of multiple forms of social solidarity, the pandemic is foregrounding many of the critical dimensions of our present, and eliciting political transformations that still

remain radically under-determined.

This year's annual **Historical Materialism Conference** invites papers and panels that seek – speculatively, experimentally, concretely – to explore how critical Marxist theory and radical practice can respond to the potentially profound changes that the pandemic is occasioning. While clichéd theoretical wisdom will argue that Marxism has failed to confront the centrality of the 'politics of life' to capitalist modernity, that it suffers a kind of biopolitical deficit, we think it is necessary to recover and foreground the rich seams of ecological, epidemiological and feminist Marxisms that have long attended to the nexus of nature, health and capitalist development and its articulation along axes of gender, sexuality, race, ability and class. But it is also imperative to think through and 'scale up' the revolutionary insights that have emerged organically out of anti-capitalist practices of, so to speak, biopolitics from below – the experiments in dual biopower through community health programmes which the Black Panthers once crystallised under the resonant slogan 'survival pending revolution'.

As in previous years, the conference will incorporate a number of streams in addition to the conference theme (in previous years these have included Marxism and Feminism; Race & Capital; Marxism, Sexuality and Political Economy; Utopia; World Literature; Philosophy, etc. – CFPs to be circulated soon) as well as individual papers on a wide range of subjects – further themes related to the general call about which we welcome papers include:

- Epidemiology and historical materialism
- Formation of the modern state and history of epidemics
- Is a communist biopolitics possible?
- Authoritarianisms and state responses to the pandemic
- Contemporary anti-capitalist movements in a time of 'social distancing'
- Covid-19 and neoliberal 'shock doctrines'
- Racism, xenophobia and pandemics
- Class struggles in the pandemic
- The EU austerity regime and conflicts over 'coronabonds'
- Radical and social histories of movements around health
- Epidemics and states of exception/emergency
- Biogeography and the geography of capital
- Historical materialist theories of 'spillover'
- Disability, power and the pandemic