

Democracy Against Neoliberalism:
Paradoxes, Limitations, Transcendence

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Abstract

Procedural (formal, liberal, capitalist or bourgeois) democracy has become the political form of neoliberalism, and it dominates political thought and state practice in most neoliberal countries. This modality of management of class relations is currently in crisis, expressed through the evacuation of politics, the erosion of civil liberties and the emergence of authoritarian modes of governance. This article offers a Marxist critique of neoliberal democracy, leading to the conclusion that neoliberalism is incompatible with the expansion of democracy into critically important areas of social life. This incompatibility is expressed by six paradoxes of democracy. Conversely, the expansion of democracy can provide the most effective lever for the abolition of neoliberalism. This path is promising for three reasons: first, the expansion of democracy is valuable in itself. Second, the contradictions between economic and political democracy illuminate the limitations of the contemporary form of capitalism. Third, struggles about the nature and content of democracy will throw into question the current class relations and the limitations of capitalism as a mode of production.