

Thinking about conflict with, or without, Karl Marx? The academic 'feud' in contemporary French political philosophy.

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Abstract

The philosophical and political advantages tied to a break with Marxist thinking have been notable. With such a break with Marxism, economic and scientific determinism have been discounted – and it is in this sort of determinism that a classic critique of Marxism finds a reason for discrediting the Marxist-Leninist project. However, it seems the cost of totally abandoning Marxist thinking has not been sufficiently examined. This article seeks to remedy this with a comparative study of two philosophers' conceptions of conflict: Mouffe's perspective will be examined and compared to Castoriadis' view of radical democracy and its treatment of conflict. The paper seeks to show that a full break with Karl Marx weakens political radicalism. In other words, by opting for a perspective on conflict which fully renounces the Marxist view, Mouffe is doing away with both the idea of direct democracy and/or that of a revolutionary project. Her approach differs from that of Castoriadis who seeks, in some sense, to remain faithful to the emancipatory aspects of Marxian thought.

Key words

Marx / Conflict / Politics / Castoriadis / Mouffe