Mike Neary, 1956-2023

Professor Richard Hall: I first met Mike Neary at the time of the student-led protests against the imposition of new student finance arrangements, in 2010. Mike took an activist-academic role. His thinking, doing, and being demonstrated how protest, opposition and alternatives, both inside-and-against, and beyond, the university might be conceptualised and realised. He appeared to me in the role of an elder, giving voice, security and safety to the practices of others. Mike was instrumental in a series of radical, concrete interventions in the world, which signalled his national importance in rethinking the idea of the university, and the revolutionary potentials of teaching and learning.

He was pivotal in the formation of the Lincoln Social Science Centre, which was constituted and governed by academics control of their pedagogic university’s learning and teaching strategy which could then enact Mike’s theoretical and learning.

At the core of this was Mike’s desire to liberate what has been stolen from us – our experience: cuando jugamos de memoria together is a much more enjoyable way of knowing the world otherwise. In his way, Mike was a human being who is a human being.

Mike Neary was a human being: full of stars, darkness, black holes, planets, temporalities, storms, craters, light and beauty, Spanish poet Miguel Hernández beautifully expresses how I felt when I left the world of Mike Neary.

Mike Neary was a human being: the distinctiveness of Marx’s theory lay… in motion”. Hence, Clarke has been treasured in the Left, arguing that the former Soviet Union was in the idea of money as the most abstract form of capitalist social relations. Hence, neo-Ricardians missed that the FSU’s transition, which is the Workers’. Workers and the Transition to Capitalism in Russia.

On the 27th of December 2022, Simon Clarke, Emeritus Professor of Sociology, Warwick University, my former PhD supervisor, mentor and friend, passed away in his home in Devon, with his family. He has left a tremendous intellectual legacy based on his theoretical and methodological revolutions within Marxism, critical sociological theory and the sociology of labour. But I have too many fond memories of him being a strong man of principle, and critical, humble, generous and affectionate with his colleagues, students and friends.

Mike Clarke was an extraordinary Marxist sociologist. He joined the Conference of Socialist Economists (CSE) created in 1969 in the UK, by participating in the Warwick Study Group. With other CSE members, he founded the journal Capital & Class, initially a bulletin, where he published a theoretical and methodological revolutions that enriched Marxism and critical sociological theory.

The CSE aimed to advance a socialist critique of Marxist orthodoxy and neo-liberalism and became a platform for theoretically informed political debate among various groupings of the British Left. CSE fellows wanted to understand the relationship between labour policy and international developments and the capitalist State’s internationalisation within global capitalism.

One of their contributions was to expose neo-Ricardian reformist views of the State as an institution-crisis by class struggle only at the point of distributing wealth in favour of the workers. By advancing an open Marxist form analysis, Clarke and fellows suggested that the State was the political form of capitalist social relations. Hence, neo-Ricardians missed that wealth distribution via policy reforms was also limited by capitalist accumulation. The problem was not finding an efficient way to distribute money, but money itself as “value in circulation”.

In Keynesianism, Monetarism, and the Crisis of the State (1980) Clarke discusses money as a central issue for Marx and relates it to the workers’ struggle. “[T]he distinctiveness of Marx’s theory lay… in the idea of money as the most abstract form of capitalist property and so the supreme social power through which social reproduction is subordinated to the power of capital” (p.13-14).

In Marx, Marginalism and Modern Sociology (1982), a book based on his sociology course on Marx’s social theory, Clarke uniquely links the development of modern economics to the emergence of sociology. He exposes the ideological dimensions of political economy and modern social science, opening a valuable space for a discussion of the limitations of those disciplines (Burnham et al., 2022).

Clarke’s 20-year journey as a critical Marxist took a new turn in the 1980s, when he saw a unique opportunity to research the transformation of labour relations in the former Soviet Union, later extending this study to China and Vietnam. The Centre for Comparative Labour Studies (Warwick) hosted his Russian research programme, under which Clarke and his team (PhD students at Warwick) collaborated with young Russian researchers associated with the ENTO network created by Clarke in Moscow, to produce hundreds of case studies and publications featuring many aspects of the historical transformation of the FSU (former Soviet states).

Hence, Clarke has been treasured in Russian sociology since then, revitalising Russian labour sociology and his original interpretation of the FSU’s transition, which challenged Russian mainstream and predominant Western analyses. Given the hybrid character of the Soviet Union, and other factors such as Russian enterprises not being subordinated to the law of value, and labour not fully subsumed in capital, Clarke uniquely claimed that we could not assume that the former Soviet Union was in transition to capitalism. “While such a transition is a possibility, it can only be as a result of struggles that lie ahead. Far from the fate of the Soviet system having been resolved, all is yet to play for” (Clarke, 1993: 11).

Clarke’s massive contribution to critical sociological Marxist research and labour studies came from an exceptional individual: a generous, caring and family man. Those like me who met him and enjoyed his company will never forget his overwhelming presence: irritating critical optimism and guidance. I will hold on to his intellectual legacy and preserve his optimistic and guiding us. I will hold on to his intellectual legacy and preserve his overwhelming presence irradiating critical optimism and guiding us. I will hold on to his intellectual legacy and preserve his overwhelming presence irradiating critical optimism and guiding us. I will hold on to his intellectual legacy and preserve his overwhelming presence irradiating critical optimism and guiding us.

References


Simon Clarke, 1946-2022

Dr Ana Dinerstein writes about her friend and colleague, Simon Clarke

Dr Ana Dinerstein, of the University of Warwick, speaks about her friend and colleague, Mike Neary

Dr Ana Dinerstein: Emeritus Professor Mike Neary was a critical sociologist, open Marxist and radical educator.

I met Mike when I started my MA in the Department of Sociology at Warwick University in the late 1990s. Mike had just started his lectureship there and ours was friendship at first sight.

I was impressed by Mike’s sophisticated, supple and sensitive sense of humour and warmth. He became my anchor in England, honouring me with his friendship, calling me “my sister”.

During my PhD years with the late Emeritus Professor Simon Clarke, we taught political sociology together. I experienced first-hand Mike’s commitment to radical scholarship and radical pedagogy. I saw the appreciation of his students and institutional leaders for his excellence in teaching and research and his warm-hearted personal.

Mike was an original Marxist sociologist, who fought against structuralist interpretations of Marx’s work, emphasising movement and struggle. My fondest memories go back to 1999, when we convened ‘The labour debate’ seminar at the Centre for Comparative Labour Studies, aiming to reposition the open Marxist debate from the ‘state’ to the ‘labour’. The presenters included John Holloway, Harry Cleaver and Dinerstein and we had a passionate debate about labour, class, fetishism, abstraction, subjectivity and resistance.

In 2002, I published the papers as an edited collection: The Labour Debate: An Investigation into the Theory and Reality of Capitalist Work, translated into Turkish (2006) and Spanish (2009). I treasure this book. In the acknowledgement we recognised each other because writing together is a much more enjoyable experience: cuando jugamos de memoria (when you know, without saying, what is in each other’s minds).

Mike Neary was a human being: full of stars, darkness, black holes, planets, temporalities, storms, craters, light and beauty, Spanish poet Miguel Hernández beautifully expresses how I felt when I left the world of Mike Neary.

A hard slap, a frozen blow; an anger and mad clench of the eye, a brutal shove has brought you down. I sweep for all my mistakes; I hear the voice; I can’t breathe in my own life. I walk on the stubble of the dead, and with warmth from no one and inconsolable, I make my way from my heart to my daily business.