

# Mike Neary, 1956-2023

## Professor Richard Hall, of De Montfort University, and Dr Ana Dinerstein, of the University of Bath, write about their friend and colleague, Mike Neary

### Professor Richard Hall:

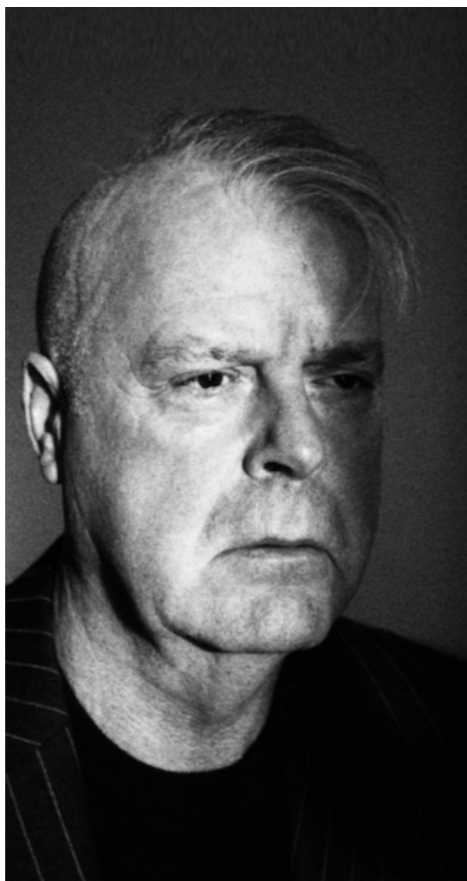
I first met Mike Neary at the time of the student-led protests against the imposition of new student finance arrangements, in 2010. Mike took an activist-academic role. His thinking, doing, and being demonstrated how protest, opposition and alternatives, both inside-and-against, and beyond, the university 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 potentialities of teaching and learning.

He was pivotal in the formation of the Lincoln Social Science Centre, which was constituted and governed as an independent, higher education co-operative. It attempted to live the ideals of democratic ownership and daily running, which could then enact Mike's theoretical commitment to student-as-producer. At the same time, as Dean of Learning and Teaching at the University of Lincoln (which he joined in 2007), he renewed the university's learning and teaching strategy based upon this same radical commitment. Building on his earlier Learning Landscapes project, Mike's strategic work sought to give academics control of their pedagogic environments.

At the core of this was Mike's desire to refocus the idea of the university, predicated upon co-operativism. As a UK National Teaching Fellow and Principal Fellow of the HEA, he helped us to sketch how research-engaged teaching might generate a common struggle between student-workers and teacher-activists. This struggle is not for the university, rather it is against what the university has become.

His final book crackles with social critique and intellectual creativity – *Student as Producer: How Do Revolutionary Teachers Teach?* is a work on avant-garde pedagogy, on revolutionary teaching and on



integrating the radical history of working-class co-operatives. Mike gave the most radical, intellectual lead of any thinker about higher education in the last 15 years.

Mike's practice pivoted around voice, and encouraging us to find our voices through struggle. This was noticeable to me, when listening to Mike work with his own stammer, and in his generous, co-production of critical work with a range of other scholars. In this, Mike's practice vibrated with the possibility that we might liberate what has been stolen from us – our ways of knowing the world otherwise. In his passing, this is what I take forward.

### 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 sophistication, unpretentiousness, 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 personality.

Mike was an original Marxist sociologist, who fought against structuralist interpretations of Marx's work, emphasising movement and struggle. My fond 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 Simon Clarke and we had a passionate debate about labour, class, fetishism, abstraction, subjectivity and resistance.

In 2002, we 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 galaxy: full of stars, darkness, black holes, planets, temporalities, storms, craters, light and beauty. Spanish poet Miguel Hernández beautifully expresses how I felt when Mike died, in an excerpt from his *Elegy to Ramón Sijé*:

A hard slap, a frozen blow,  
an invisible and murderous stroke of the axe,  
a brutal shove has brought you down.  
I weep for all my misfortunes  
I feel more about your death than 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

# Simon Clarke, 1946-2022

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

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, surrounded by 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 family.

Simon 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 his theoretical, empirical 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 domestic policy and international developments and the capitalist State's internationalisation within globalisation during the Thatcher years.

One of their contributions was to expose neo-Ricardian reformist views of the State as an institution criss-crossed 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 motion".

In *Keynesianism, Monetarism, and the Crisis of the State* (1988) Clarke discusses money as a central issue for the Left, arguing that "[t]he distinctiveness of Marx's theory lay ... in the idea of money as the most abstract form of capitalist property and so as 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., 2023).

Clarke's 20-year journey as a critical Marxist took a new turn in the 1990s, 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 ISITO 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 irradiating critical optimism and guiding us. I will hold on to his intellectual legacy and preserve his energetic and loving presence forever. Goodbye, dear Simon. RIP

### References

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