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Understanding contemporary capitalism

A new research agenda for SPERI

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Sheffield Political Economy Research Institute.

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A New Era for SPERI

Genevieve LeBaron and Colin Hay
Directors of SPERI

The world has changed profoundly since 2012, the year of SPERI's founding. Occupy Wall St has given way to mobilisation of the populist right on the streets of many of our cities. Tech giants, new financial investors, and 'superstar' companies are now much more dominant and powerful than the old consumer brands. The government bailout funds would seem to be over, at least for now. Mostly, they've been spent repairing the balance sheets of the big banks and propping up the institutions of a largely unreformed global finance sector, while for millions of households the compound damage wreaked by predatory lending, unprecedented levels of personal debt, the 'casualisation' of work and shrinking wages has yet to be reversed.

Many commentators and scholars predicted that the 2008 global financial crisis would be a tipping point, pushing governments to regulate us into a more equitable and stable economic order. Yet, ten years down the line, the world is more economically unequal, politically unstable and teetering again on the brink of multiple crises.¹

Today's capitalist system is characterised by dramatic inequalities of income and, above all, wealth. If distributional trends since the 2008 financial crash continue, the House of Commons library estimates that by 2030, the top 1% will hold 64% of the world's wealth.² Corporate profits are at near record highs for big American corporations.³ At the same time, the share of value allocated to the workforce seems to be in perpetual decline. Across large swathes of the global economy, real wages have been stagnating or declining for decades, living standards are falling, and working poverty is an acute concern. Millions at the base of global supply chains are stuck in insecure, informal, and often exploitative jobs, while forced labour has become a predictable and endemic feature of contemporary business models.⁴ And all this time the planet is growing warmer, with climate breakdown already causing havoc to the lives and livelihoods of the world's poorest inhabitants, as environmental destruction rages in our oceans, forests, and ecosystems.

During SPERI's first six years, some things have stayed the same — such as the simultaneous ascendancy and fragility of the financial sector and the concentration of immense wealth and power in the hands of large corporations. But much has also changed, both in macro systemic terms, and in the texture of people's daily economic and social lives. We are currently in the midst of a shift of potentially seismic proportions that — like many such great historic jolts in the *longue durée* of global capitalism — is only likely to be fully describable in retrospect. We are somewhere in between the era of the 'great recession' and the new paradigm of global capitalism that could yet replace it — an interregnum of sorts. And as the world changes, SPERI is changing with it.

¹ C. Hay and T. Hunt (eds) (2018) *The Coming Crisis*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan

² M. Savage (2018) 'Richest 1% on target to own two-thirds of all wealth by 2030', *The Observer*.
<https://www.theguardian.com/business/2018/apr/07/global-inequality-tipping-point-2030>

³ J. Fox (2018) 'Small Companies Aren't Sharing in the Corporate Boom', *Bloomberg*.
<https://www.bloomberg.com/opinion/articles/2018-05-29/profits-near-record-highs-for-corporate-america-s-big-companies>

⁴ G. LeBaron (2018) *The Global Business of Forced Labour: Report of Findings*, SPERI and the University of Sheffield
<http://globalbusinessofforcedlabour.ac.uk/report/>

SPERI old and new

SPERI was established in the immediate wake of the financial crisis, with the broad mission of addressing the big political and economic challenges of our times. Much of our early work focused on exploring the causes and consequences of the 2008 global financial crisis and the subsequent era of 'Great Uncertainty'.⁵

Today, the great uncertainty has hardly been resolved – indeed, the massive political and economic challenges of our times stretch far beyond the aftermath of the crisis, as in a sense they always did. Understanding contemporary capitalism, and the major economic and political challenges that arise from it, continues to be our most urgent task as political economists. In the face of extreme imbalances of wealth and power, financial instability, and environmental degradation, there is an urgent need for fresh thinking about how contemporary economies work and the public policies which could achieve more equal and sustainable societies.

This is the context in which we have chosen to refocus our research efforts around four key research priorities – each addressing issues and concerns at the core of contemporary capitalism and the tendencies and counter-tendencies it unleashes.⁶ Each is set out in more detail in this paper.

Capitalism, Democracy & the State

Our first theme is the broadest and the most ambitious and provides a frame for the others. In it we seek to chart and to understand the character of contemporary capitalism, and the dynamic reconfiguration of its social order, political relations and states, which together give form, structure and shape to the world in which we live.

The three others build on this, drilling down a level to reveal separate dimensions in the structuring of global capitalism.

Finance, Debt & Society

Financial markets have become larger, deeper and more complex, exerting increasing influence over our everyday lives. This research theme explores the political, institutional, economic, technological and cultural dynamics of change in the financial and monetary sphere and its effects on society. This includes a focus on the processes of financialisation and the changing sociology of financial networks; the sustainability of a debt-based economy for firms and households; financial risk and evolving patterns of macroeconomic policy and governance; financial innovation and crisis; the shifting balance and character of monetary and fiscal policy; and the co-evolution of large global financial centres and tax competition.

Corporate Power & the Global Economy

Corporations have unprecedented wealth, scale, and power within the global economy. As corporate control over global production, consumption and distribution systems increases, so too does business actors' economic and political influence. This research theme investigates the changing nature of

⁵ C. Hay and A. Payne (2013) *The Great Uncertainty*, SPERI Paper No.5
<http://speri.dept.shef.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/SPERI-Paper-No.5-The-Great-Uncertainty-389KB.pdf>

⁶ Full details of each of SPERI's four new research themes can be found here: <http://speri.dept.shef.ac.uk/our-research/>

corporations, their interactions with states and civil society and the causes and consequences of growing corporate power, legitimacy and authority in international politics. It explores the multiple impact of corporations on people, politics and the environment, describing and mapping the global supply chains that interconnect the economies of the global North and South.

Labour & Decent Work

The nature of labour and work in the global economy is changing fast. The rapid reconfiguration of business models, new technologies associated with 'digitalisation' and automation, and shifting patterns of production, are changing power dynamics between workers and employers. Labour exploitation and forced labour are rife across many countries and sectors. Workers and unions face serious obstacles in exerting rights and achieving living wages, job security and safe workplaces. This research theme investigates how decent work can be promoted, both through public governance initiatives such as labour and migration law and its enforcement, and state regulation of business and supply chains and social protection, and through private systems of corporate and worker-driven social responsibility.

Each of these research fields has been chosen to illuminate key features of contemporary capitalist social, political and economic relations. Together, we suggest, they allow us to detail and describe the zones in which major transformation and policy innovation will be required if the economy is to be made more inclusive, more sustainable and more equal – more *just*.

Our approach to political economy

While our research focus is shifting, our approach to political economy remains unchanged. SPERI builds on a long tradition of global and comparative political economy that has been alive at the University of Sheffield for over twenty-five years, since the founding of the Political Economy Research Centre in 1994 and the journal *New Political Economy* two years later.⁷

As we describe in our mission statement,⁸ our approach to political economy research is anchored in a commitment to theoretical and methodological pluralism.⁹ We believe that to capture the multiple ways in which capitalist processes shape economic and social life, from the household to the international corporation, from the local state to the global order, the use of different intellectual traditions and methodological approaches can provide deeper insight than singular perspectives. We believe that theory needs to be tested against rigorous empirical work. At the same time, specific studies can only be properly understood within their wider structural context. We are committed to continuing to provide the holistic, big picture analysis that is so badly needed to understand the world we live in.

We will also continue to put a high premium on real-world relevance of academic work and of translating our research into feasible policy proposals and accessible public discourse.

⁷ *New Political Economy* was founded at the University of Sheffield in March 1996. Information about the journal can be found here: <http://speri.dept.shef.ac.uk/new-political-economy/>

⁸ SPERI's new mission statement can be read at <http://speri.dept.shef.ac.uk/about-speri/>

⁹ We share the commitment to theoretical and methodological pluralism that was set out in the founding editorial of *New Political Economy*: A. Gamble, A. Payne, A. Hoogvelt, M. Dietrich and M. Kenny (1996) Editorial: New political economy, *New Political Economy*, 1:1, 5-11 <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/13563469608406234>

In this paper, originally published as a blog series and collectively planned and written by members of the SPERI research team, we seek to map out our new intellectual agenda, whilst we hope making clear that its inspiration lies in a continuation of the long critical political economy tradition that SPERI was created to strengthen and deepen.¹⁰ Political economy, understood as the study of the necessary interconnectedness and interdependence of the political and the economic, has arguably never been more difficult, but it has also never been more important. Our capacity to hold to account the economic processes which so frequently structure life chances and their staggeringly uneven distribution depend upon it.

¹⁰ The blog series is available at <https://speri.dept.shef.ac.uk/tag/speri-research-agenda/>

Capitalism, Democracy & the State

The 2008 financial crisis rocked global capitalism to its foundations.¹ In its aftermath growth has slowed, living standards have stagnated, inequality has risen and tight fiscal austerity has re-shaped the social and political structure of many advanced countries. Developing economies have not been spared from these convulsions.² A decade on, the economic and political order is unstable and uncertain.³ Grappling with the character and dynamics of contemporary capitalism is essential if we are to understand the world we live in and the challenges to which it is giving rise.

Capitalism after the crash

Capitalism after the crisis embodies a distinctive combination of the old and new. While the dynamics which were the hallmarks of pre-crash capitalism – globalisation, financialisation, growing trade and capital account imbalances, the development of new technologies, rising inequality – remain, they have been reshaped since 2008.

Globalisation – the tendency towards continued integration and inter-connectedness across the global economy – continues. Though patterns of trade and foreign direct investment have slowed, global value chains have continued to evolve, as exemplified by growing ‘south-south’ trade and the emergence of new labour and environmental governance regimes.⁴ China’s development remains the central motor of global expansion, but in Latin America, South East Asia and Africa countries face new challenges such as the fall-out of the post-crash slump in commodity prices.⁵

The ascent of global finance has been a defining characteristic of capitalist development over recent decades. Since 2008, the financial sector has retained its dominant position in the world economy, but it confronts new conditions, as central banks have taken a more active role in supporting and regulating the sector. Yet systemic financial risk remains high, not least due to the development of new forms of shadow banking and the enlarged scale of corporate balance sheets.⁶

Since the 1980s global elites have secured an ever-increasing share of income and wealth, with the share of economic output paid in wages collapsing in almost all developed countries. But again, the post-2008 context has reconfigured distributional trends.⁷ ‘Quantitative easing’ (QE) and speculative

¹ A. Gamble (2014) *Crisis without end? The unravelling of western prosperity*. Basingstoke: Palgrave-Macmillan

² M. Bishop, A. Payne et al (2018) *Revisiting the developmental state* SPERI Paper No. 43
<http://speri.dept.shef.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/SPERI-Paper-No.-43-Revisiting-the-developmental-state.pdf>

³ C. Hay and A. Payne (2013) *The Great Uncertainty*, SPERI Paper No.5
<http://speri.dept.shef.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/SPERI-Paper-No.5-The-Great-Uncertainty-389KB.pdf>

⁴ N. Phillips (2013) ‘Global value chains: Why the Fuss?’, *SPERI Comment blog*
<http://speri.dept.shef.ac.uk/2013/08/21/global-chains-fuss/>

⁵ V. Muzaka (2017) ‘Revisiting the developmental state 5: India and Brazil in the 21st century’, *SPERI Comment blog*
<http://speri.dept.shef.ac.uk/2017/10/23/revisiting-the-developmental-state-5-india-and-brazil-in-the-21st-century/>

⁶ A. Baker and R. Murphy (2016) ‘The Coming Crisis: systemic stabilization and the investment state’, *SPERI Comment blog*
<http://speri.dept.shef.ac.uk/2016/05/17/the-coming-crisis-systemic-stabilization-and-the-investment-state/>

⁷ SPERI staff and students (2015) *Inequality Redux*, SPERI Paper No.22
<http://speri.dept.shef.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/11/SPERI-Paper-22-inequality-redux.pdf>

investment in land and property have boosted the wealth of asset-holders.⁸ Public expenditure cuts have disproportionately fallen on lower income households, women and members of minority ethnic groups. Wealth inequality has taken on a sharply intergenerational as well as class-based character.

Information and communication technologies have taken on new forms, as the growth of giant digital platform companies has changed not just the character of production and consumption, but key patterns of social life. The newly central roles of data and digital infrastructure, combined with the potential for automation by artificial intelligence and related technologies, raise profound questions about the future of modern economies.

Meanwhile the longstanding accumulation of environmental damage by industrialised economies has gone from chronic problem to acute crisis.⁹ It is now clear that national and international attempts to curb greenhouse gas emissions are occurring much too slowly to avert disaster. The wider failures to control biodiversity loss, air pollution and soil degradation not only threaten ecological integrity and social stability; they look increasingly hard to address as multilateralism breaks down.

Politics after the crash

Within post-crash capitalism, profound shifts have also taken place in the sphere of politics, notably in the so-called 'populist' insurgency which has gripped the West in the last few years. In Europe, several right-wing nationalist parties have formed governments whilst others are now challenging for power. Social movements and parties on the left, such as Syriza in Greece, Podemos in Spain and the British Labour Party, have gained significant popular support. The Brexit referendum result has been widely interpreted as a popular revolt against political elites and an economy no longer raising living standards for most people. Among other emerging economies, all of the original four BRIC countries (Brazil, Russia, India and China) are now led by nationalist-authoritarian leaders. Most significantly, Donald Trump's presidency has not only reconfigured US politics; it threatens to disrupt the international trade system and geopolitical order.

A new research agenda

Understanding these trends requires a focus on the nature of contemporary capitalism – and in particular its relationships to the state, and to democratic politics. We focus on three kinds of research question:

- What is happening in the post-crash economic world? How are economies developing, what trends and dynamics can we observe, what forces are at play and how do they relate to wider processes of global restructuring?
- How should we best understand how capitalist systems work? What theoretical perspectives and analytical frameworks provide insight into their structures and dynamics?
- What ideas, discourses, policies and political processes might help society address the challenges which arise from capitalism in its contemporary form? What might help chart a path to economies and societies which are more socially equitable, environmentally sustainable and politically democratic?

⁸ J. Green and S. Lavery (2015) *The Regressive Recovery: Distribution, Inequality and State Power in Britain's Post-Crisis Political Economy*, *New Political Economy*, 20:6, 894-923

⁹ M. Craig (2017) *Ecological Political Economy and the Socio-Ecological Crisis*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan

Four broad perspectives inform our approach.

The first is a recognition that capitalism is a *holistic* system and social order. In public debate ‘the economy’ is often treated as an independent and autonomous sphere of activity. In some versions of economic theory, it is viewed as having a distinctive ‘market’ logic, analysable in terms of the rational decisions of self-interested individuals and profit-maximising firms. But these approaches neglect the deep embeddedness of the economic system within wider social and cultural norms, political institutions and policies, and environmental constraints. This embeddedness creates both different forms of capitalism in different places and at different times, and complex interactions between economic, social, cultural, political and environmental forces. Relationships of power – between capital and labour, finance and production, different geographical entities, market forces and communities – are always present, and in turn these shape and are shaped by those of gender and race.

Second, we seek to understand capitalism as a *historical* process. Economies evolve in path-dependent ways. Technological advances, financial cycles and public policies often interact in analogous ways in different periods. Since 2008, some have expressed surprise that market liberalism has survived the crisis. But after the Great Depression of the 1930s, it took over fifteen years and a world war for the regime of ‘managed capitalism’ to be put in place; and after the crises of the 1970s, more than a decade for the free market ‘neoliberal’ order to emerge. Historical analysis can help inform current prognoses.

Third, capitalism always assumes a *geographical* form. It is shaped by distinctive institutional structures and political contexts at the local, regional, national and supranational levels. Different models or ‘varieties’ of capitalism co-exist, such as the Anglo-American liberal model, the coordinated models of Northern Europe and the developmental states of East Asia and Latin America. Recognising the *diversity* of capitalism is essential. At the same time, adopting a geographical perspective allows us to capture how national and regional economies are integrated into wider international orders, and the huge internal power imbalances – between metropolitan centres and neglected rural and ex-industrial peripheries, for example – which profoundly shape the politics of many countries today.

Fourth, capitalism is simultaneously *dynamic and dysfunctional*. Driven by technological innovation and credit creation, capitalism tends not just to increase productivity and generate the accumulation of capital, but to restructure patterns of social life. These processes generate internal tensions which weaken the conditions for future growth. Rising inequalities, speculative flows of capital and over-dependence on limited environmental resources render capitalist economies highly susceptible to instability and crisis. Such economies are at once dependent on the state – to provide order, infrastructure, public services and the conditions for continued social reproduction – and under constant pressure from business interests to limit public expenditure and taxation. Capitalism therefore both relies upon and is constantly driven to undermine the social and environmental foundations on which it relies for its success.

A political economy approach

Seeking to understand capitalism in these ways is the work of political economy. It involves the study not just of ‘the economy’, understood in terms of market agents and their behaviours, but also of how economic activity is embedded within and shaped by wider constellations of social and political power.¹⁰ In the post-crash world, for example, creditor states and financial institutions have a vested

¹⁰ M. Watson (2014) *Uneconomic Economics and the Crisis of the Model World*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan

interest in maintaining the prevailing order, while social and environmental movements, and insurgent political forces, seek to disrupt it. There are businesses which may support reform and others which will resist it. The future of the global order is not therefore determined simply by the 'structural' logic of the global economy.

Modern economies operate within a huge and diverse array of laws, public institutions and infrastructure. The 'boundaries' between these political institutions and economic activity are constantly subject to negotiation, not just over specific state actions but over the very role and legitimacy of state activity in the economy. In this way capitalist economies are deeply influenced by *politics*, at the level both of policy and of ideology. So the relationship between politics – in particular democratic politics – and capitalism must be at the forefront of analysis.

In the period prior to the 2008 crash, policymakers sought to insulate market mechanisms from the democratic system in a variety of ways.¹¹ Independent central banks, the growth of powerful regulatory agencies and new transnational legal forms precipitated a shift towards 'post-democratic' forms of governance. The various populist movements which animate the 'post-crash' world embody a backlash against this institutional order. At the same time, the democratic powers of domestic legislatures have been further eroded in the post-crisis era, for example in the EU's new macroeconomic architecture and through the rise of authoritarian tendencies in the West.¹² The world's second largest economy is non-democratic in form. The relationship between 'democracy' and 'capitalism' is increasingly characterised by tension and new sources of possible conflict.

The post-crash world is riven with deep structural weaknesses and sharp antagonisms, but this period is also charged with possibility. The intellectual foundations which underpinned the pre-crash order have been radically undermined.¹³ A space for alternative models of development has decisively emerged. New ideas, analysis, policies and political strategies need to be formulated. By bringing analytical insights from political economy to bear upon the pressing challenges created by the interplay of capitalism, democracy and the state, SPERI's research aims to contribute to meeting this difficult intellectual and political task.

¹¹ C. Hay (2007) *Why We Hate Politics*. Cambridge: Polity Press

¹² C. B. Tansel (ed) (2017) *States of Discipline: Authoritarian Neoliberalism and the Contested Reproduction of Capitalist Order*. London: Rowman & Littlefield International

¹³ C. Hay and A. Payne (2015) *Civic Capitalism*. Cambridge: Polity Press

Finance, Debt & Society

Over the past decade, conventional thinking on the financial sector has been turned on its head.¹ Prior to the 2008 financial crisis, policymakers argued that deregulated financial markets would self-regulate and accurately price risk. But in fact, complex financial products generated significant credit bubbles and destabilising speculation. The state, far from being powerless in an age of mobile capital flows, actively came to the rescue of the global financial system through ‘bail-out’ packages and the embrace of unconventional monetary policy. The crash exposed severe blind-spots in mainstream understandings of the financial system.² Yet despite this, the world economy remains deeply immersed with the ebbs and flows of global finance.

These processes have confirmed what those working in the tradition of political economy have long argued. Finance is not simply a ‘neutral’ allocative economic mechanism aligning savers and borrowers; it is a sphere of social activity that profoundly shapes and is shaped by power relations and politics. Grounded in this political economy tradition, SPERI’s *Finance, Debt and Society* research theme examines the dynamics of financial power at work in our unstable post-crash world.

Finance at the global, national & ‘everyday’ scales

In analysing finance, it is important to recognise that, though it can often appear abstract and ‘disembedded’ from any particular place, it is always mediated by distinctive institutions at the global, regional, national and household scales.

Over recent decades, the world economy has experienced a long wave of financialisation, understood as the increased role of financial motives, markets and actors across domestic and international economies. The post-war Bretton Woods settlement had explicitly sought to place constraints on ‘hot’ money – speculative flows of capital which could destabilise currencies and instigate crises.³ Finance was partially contained within national borders, through a system of fixed exchange rates and capital controls. From the 1960s onwards, the financial sector sought to escape these constraints, first as the City of London became a space through which dollar-denominated transactions could escape US oversight through the euro-dollar markets, then through deregulatory initiatives such as the abolition of exchange controls and the ‘Big Bang’ of the 1980s.⁴ The shift towards international capital mobility empowered and underpinned the development of firms with a global orientation, such as transnational corporations, global investment banks, derivatives traders, and hedge funds. The institutional architecture of this new financial order – tight fiscal discipline, capital account liberalisation and the creation of operationally independent central banks – was underpinned by the US commitment to an ‘open’ financial system, backed-up by international organisations such as the IMF and World Bank.

¹ A. Gamble (2009) *The Spectre at the Feast: Capitalist Crisis and the Politics of Recession*. Basingstoke: Palgrave-Macmillan

² H. Thompson (2016) ‘The Coming Crisis: we’re not in Kansas any more’, *SPERI Comment blog* <http://speri.dept.shef.ac.uk/2016/05/24/the-coming-crisis-were-not-in-kansas-any-more/>

³ E. Helleiner (1996) *States and the Re-emergence of Global Finance*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

⁴ J. Green (2016). Anglo-American development, the Euromarkets, and the deeper origins of neoliberal deregulation. *Review of International Studies*, 42(3), 425-449

Financial globalisation has occurred alongside a deepening of global trade, with these two dynamics becoming increasingly intertwined over recent decades. China's huge trade surpluses have underpinned the purchase of dollar-denominated assets, whilst cheap Chinese imports constrained inflationary pressures in the West and contributed to the low interest rate environment which sustained the pre-2008 global credit bubble.⁵ Similar trade and capital account dynamics between the Eurozone's 'core' and 'periphery' have intensified geographical imbalances within European capitalism.⁶

Government policies, national legal structures and institutional frameworks played a key role in shaping the rise of global finance. The abolition of capital controls which 'freed' financial movement was driven by states grappling with domestic political dilemmas, as well as by the lobbying efforts of financial actors. A distinctive trans-Atlantic deregulatory dynamic subsequently emerged as the US and UK sought to retain the competitiveness of Wall Street and the City of London.⁷ As the fall-out from 2008 revealed, national states continue to play a critical role in underpinning the liquidity of the financial sector. Banks across Europe, Asia and America were supported by re-capitalisation funds from their own governments and 'swap lines' arranged by the US Federal Reserve.

The rise of global finance did not only take place within corporate headquarters and the meetings of central bank officials. It has also been rooted in the everyday experience of households, families and individual citizens. The liberalisation of global finance occurred alongside an erosion of collective, 'risk-sharing' forms of welfare like social housing and pensions. In this context, household debt boomed and risk became increasingly individualised. Public and institutional pensions were replaced with individual portfolios⁸ and people were encouraged to meet their future welfare needs through home ownership.⁹ The pensions, savings and investments of the moderately well-off became, in the hands of institutional investors, highly mobile stocks of global capital. Financial globalisation did not therefore only reconfigure 'markets'; it also had profound implications for individuals and for patterns of everyday life.

Finance & inequality

Understanding the role of global finance today must also take into account its relationship to deep distributional shifts within advanced capitalist states. Growing inequality and the rise of finance are closely intertwined. New kinds of asset management firms have taken up a central role in corporate ownership, driving an emphasis on achieving short term 'shareholder value'.¹⁰ This has driven a wave of corporate concentration, restructurings and 'rationalisation' that has increased pressure on

⁵ H. Thompson (2010) *China and the Mortgaging of America: Economic Interdependence and Domestic Politics*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

⁶ P. Kaczmarczyk (2018) 'Germany's non-rebalancing of its mercantilist model', *SPERI Comment blog* <http://speri.dept.shef.ac.uk/2018/11/12/germanys-non-rebalancing-of-its-mercantilist-model/>

⁷ C. Hay (2013) *The Failure of Anglo-liberal Capitalism*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

⁸ C. Berry (2015) 'Citizenship in a financialised society', *SPERI Comment blog* <http://speri.dept.shef.ac.uk/2015/08/28/citizenship-financialised-society/>

⁹ C. Hay (2014) 'The asset-based welfare paradox: twist or split?', *SPERI Comment blog* <http://speri.dept.shef.ac.uk/2014/07/01/asset-based-welfare-paradox-twist-split/>

¹⁰ A. Leaver, E. Heemskerck and J. Fichtner (2018) 'If this is capitalism, where are the price signals?: The glacial effects of passive investment', *SPERI Comment blog* <http://speri.dept.shef.ac.uk/2018/09/03/if-this-is-capitalism-where-are-the-price-signals-the-glacial-effects-of-passive-investment/>

firms to minimise costs, in particular through eroding wages and the employment conditions of the workforce. The concentration of wealth at the upper end of the income distribution has led to a glut of funds available for speculative investment.

In states unable to secure a surplus through export markets, private debt and consumer spending have increasingly acted as the key drivers of economic expansion within 'debt-led' economies such as the UK, US and the Southern Eurozone.¹¹ This increased reliance on credit has fallen unevenly across existing racial, class-based and gendered inequalities. Sub-prime loans in the US were aggressively targeted at marginalised groups, such as low-income Latino and black households, who subsequently suffered foreclosure and financial distress. In these ways, finance can reproduce and deepen existing social stratifications, with potentially explosive political consequences.¹²

The 2008 crisis compounded the dysfunctional relationship between finance and inequality. The impacts of austerity programmes, justified as measures to reduce public deficits by cutting public expenditure cuts, have disproportionately fallen on low income households, public sector workers and women. Real wages have fallen but asset prices have been maintained through quantitative easing (QE) and other forms of monetary stimulus.¹³ At the same time, attempts by powerful states to resolve domestic crises through loose monetary policy have destabilised the global macroeconomic environment. The unwinding of QE potentially threatens new bouts of global instability.¹⁴ Deep interconnections between states mean that the disruptive and distributional consequences of financial capitalism play out globally.

The politics of financial transformation

Whilst conventional policymaking thinking has extolled the virtues of large financial markets, more critical voices have pointed to the profound dysfunctions which an over-sized financial sector can generate. The idea of a 'finance curse' highlights the potential economic damage which 'too much finance' can cause through the misallocation of resources or increased exposure to crisis.¹⁵ Much like the analogous 'resource curse', that can accompany the discovery of a high-value mineral such as oil, the presence of a major global financial centre within a country is a double-edged sword. The financial sector generates significant employment and exports, but also large rents, which divert high-skilled workers and investable capital away from other sectors of the economy. Inflows of foreign investment can both push up the exchange rate, making export-oriented sectors uncompetitive, and expose a country to greater risks of contagion from international financial crises. How to move financialised economies away from their dependence on unrestrained finance is therefore a pressing question.

¹¹ C. Hay (2013). Treating the Symptom Not the Condition: Crisis Definition, Deficit Reduction and the Search for a New British Growth Model. *The British Journal of Politics and International Relations*, 15(1), 23–37

¹² D. Fields and S. Uffer. (2016). The financialisation of rental housing: A comparative analysis of New York City and Berlin. *Urban Studies*, 53(7), 1486–1502.

¹³ J. Green and S. Lavery (2015) The Regressive Recovery: Distribution, Inequality and State Power in Britain's Post-Crisis Political Economy, *New Political Economy*, 20:6, 894-923.

¹⁴ J. Best (2016) 'The Coming Crisis: the monetary policy credibility trap', *SPERI Comment blog*
<http://speri.dept.shef.ac.uk/2016/04/19/the-coming-crisis-the-monetary-policy-credibility-trap/>

¹⁵ A. Baker, G. Epstein and J. Montecino (2018) *The UK's Finance Curse? Costs and Processes*. SPERI report
<http://speri.dept.shef.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/SPERI-The-UKs-Finance-Curse-Costs-and-Processes.pdf>

Despite the long-term damage which financialisation can cause, it also produces entrenched constituencies of support which can make its reversal difficult. The British Treasury, for example, has become heavily dependent on tax revenues generated by the City of London. Whilst unbridled growth in house prices and tight credit conditions have excluded millions of young prospective homeowners from the property market, locking them into often exploitative rent relations, those with existing housing wealth have an entrenched interest in maintaining the status quo. Any political solution aimed at improving access to housing is likely to generate severe resistance from those who stand to lose out. Mapping these constituencies is a key task for those seeking to build political support for a transformation of the financial sector and its relationship to society.

Finance plays a fundamental role in our economic and social world. It therefore raises deep normative questions. What social function should finance play?¹⁶ How do the distributional dynamics of the financial system, and central bank interventions, relate to broader conceptions of distributive justice? What institutional form might a more sustainable financial system assume? Is it possible for investment to be embedded within a wider conception of the public good? These are difficult questions, but alternative models of finance have existed historically and continue to exist in embryonic forms today. Public investment banks can place financial decision-making under a layer of democratic control that can take account of wider social interests. The return of mutual societies or credit unions has the potential to embed finance within particular places and communities. Whatever form an alternative financial system takes, it is essential that it secures a degree of autonomy from the logics and pressures inherent in the contemporary global financial system. Constraining and embedding finance within democratically accountable local, national and global structures is therefore a necessary condition of designing a more socially oriented system of credit provision.

The sheer scale of global finance has created formidable centres of power. A vision of finance as a domain of market 'rationality', as presented by mainstream economics, financial lobbyists and some politicians, entrenches existing power relations.¹⁷ The financial system as a whole remains vulnerable to future breakdowns. Financial capitalism in its current form is riven with internal tensions and imbalances. But these will not be resolved automatically. A new politics of financial reform, underpinned by research and analysis, is necessary if broader socio-economic change is to occur.

¹⁶ A. Baker (2018) Macropprudential regimes and the politics of social purpose, *Review of International Political Economy*, 25:3, 293-316.

¹⁷ M. Watson (2014) *Uneconomic Economics and the Crisis of the Model World*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

Corporate Power & the Global Economy

Corporations sit at the heart of contemporary capitalism. They command vast resources, govern entire swaths of our economy, and wield immense political power. For instance, the 2017 sales of Walmart, the world's top retailer, was around US\$500 billion, around the scale of the GDP of a rich country like Norway. The market values of Apple and Amazon both crossed the trillion dollar line in 2018.¹ A handful of companies including Bayer-Monsanto, PepsiCo, and Nestlé command the global food system, while just three companies— Samsung, Huawei and Apple— hold nearly 50% of the worldwide market share of smartphones.² In today's global economy, titanic companies perform diverse commercial functions once performed by distinct firms; Amazon, for instance, is a retailer, a credit lender, a publishing house, manufacturer, marketing platform, and filmmaker, amongst many other things.

As the wheels of the global economy turn at the hands of an ever-smaller group of ever-larger and ever-richer corporations, the structural power of these corporations is surging. Amidst the rise of 'mega-firms' and 'superstar' companies, even the International Monetary Fund— which is hardly known as a critic of big business— recently sounded an alarm about corporate power and monopolization, noting that such trends are influencing macroeconomic outcomes.³

Recent developments surrounding transnational corporations (TNCs) confirm what some political economists have emphasized for decades — that the concentration, and dominance of transnational corporations is profoundly restructuring the global economy. To paraphrase political economist Susan Strange's assertion in the mid-1990s, TNCs have become central organisers of global economic activity and key decision-makers over who gets what, when, where, and how in the global marketplace.⁴ This is far truer today, two decades after Strange's largely unheeded plea for scholars of international politics to take TNCs seriously and to study corporate power. A sophisticated understanding of the nature, dynamics, and impacts of corporations and the power they exert within contemporary capitalism is essential if we are to understand how the global economy functions and shapes people's life chances.

The politics of corporations

The corporation is by no means a new political actor. As some of the world's first transnational enterprises, the British and Dutch East India Companies were central to colonial projects in South and Southeast Asia. They extracted and transferred resources and wealth from peripheral colonies to their respective metropolises, and acted as instruments of direct and indirect political authority. What is more, since the emergence of the international state system in the mid-1600s, constellations

¹ D. Streitfeld (2018) 'Amazon Hits \$1,000,000,000,000 in Value, Following Apple', *New York Times*
<https://www.nytimes.com/2018/09/04/technology/amazon-stock-price-1-trillion-value.html>

² Business Wire (2018) 'Global Smartphone Shipments Down 6.0% in Q3 2018 as the Leading Vendor and the Largest Market Face Challenges, According to IDC'
<https://www.businesswire.com/news/home/20181101006212/en/Global-Smartphone-Shipments-6.0-Q3-2018-Leading>

³ F. Diez, D. Leigh and S. Tambunlertchai (2018) *Global Market Power and its Macroeconomic Implications* IMF Working Paper No. 18/137
<https://www.imf.org/en/Publications/WP/Issues/2018/06/15/Global-Market-Power-and-its-Macroeconomic-Implications-45975>

⁴ S. Strange. (1996). *The Retreat of the State: The Diffusion of Power in the World Economy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

of non-state actors, including corporations, have both competed and colluded with governments over rule-making authority, as well as the provision of public goods and services. Indeed, market order in most parts of the world has long been characterised by authority structures in which corporations have maintained tense, but also synergistic relationships with states and societies. In short, from the early days of global capitalism, the answer to ‘who rules?’ has not simply been the state and its elected representatives, but also corporations.

More recent transformations have augmented the corporation’s political and economic powers. The intense liberalisation of national and global markets since the 1970s afforded corporations new freedoms of movement across borders, and significantly in some markets, the authority to self-regulate. The era of economic globalisation has been one in which the rights of corporations to operate, own, and profit increasingly surpasses the capacity of national and international institutions to effectively regulate their activities.

Additionally, advancements in communications and transportation technologies have facilitated the rapid globalisation of production systems. Today, many goods and services are produced through highly networked and geographically diffuse supply chains. Within them producers, sellers, contractors, and consumers are simultaneously closely linked *and* distant, often making it difficult to identify where key decisions are being made and power resides. What is more, by crisscrossing multiple legal jurisdictions, supply chains have contributed to the de-territorialisation and ‘de-statisation’ of corporate governance. As a result, corporations and institutional investors have been able to distance themselves from the impacts of their productive activities on labour, ecosystems and social stability and thereby shield themselves from criticism and legal consequences.

Big business power over civil society and states

The ways in which civil society seeks to influence corporations has transformed over the last three decades. Many companies have successfully improved their public images from evil, profit-hungry extraction machines into responsible global citizens, using corporate social responsibility (CSR) as a visible component of their interactions with states and society. Indeed, sizable resources have been channelled by individual companies and industry associations into efforts to present corporations as the solution to problems like global warming and modern slavery, rather than a key cause of social and environmental problems. While more radical criticism of corporations and opposition through direct action still happens– and is especially prominent amongst some trade unions and within communities that find themselves at the blunt end of capitalist accumulation, for example in mining communities across the global South– many activists, trade unions and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) now pursue more conciliatory strategies that work alongside corporations within market structures. For instance, the environmental NGO Greenpeace has partnered with large corporations like Unilever and Coca Cola to develop eco-friendly ‘Greenfreeze’ refrigerants, while human rights, labour, and gender-based NGOs like Oxfam are also allying and partnering with big business. These dynamics have enabled corporations to help shape global policy agendas to better support their own interests, and can put them at the centre of governance to co-produce outcomes.

As corporations have gained greater legitimacy and authority as governance actors, there has been a blurring of ‘public’ and ‘private’ governance power within the global economy. The extent to which private and public regulatory actors interact, collaborate, diverge, and can be still be meaningfully distinguished are open empirical questions requiring investigation across jurisdictions, types of business actor, and issue areas. This is true in both global North and South contexts. Business actors work closely with government departments on a range of issues, and influence them through activities such as lobbying, financial contributions, and other, more pernicious modes of “state capture”. In the

South, many corporations domiciled within emerging economies operate abroad in close connection with home-state institutions such as national development banks, which provide them with finance capital and operational guidelines for their overseas ventures. Such practices are not new; indeed, they often stretch back to earlier eras of global capitalism. For instance, in the UK, the notion of 'industrial strategy' has recently resurfaced, but the practice of states investing in, guiding and cooperating with corporate activity is far from new. As corporations become increasingly massive, rich, and powerful, there is an urgent need to investigate the shifting dynamics of their political power, including the various ways in which business actors exert power, and their interactions with and influence over governance actors like local and national governments, NGOs, and grassroots activists. The rise of the emerging economies, South-South trade and non-Western corporations requires fresh analyses that dig deeper into how corporate-state relations are conceptualized outside of the global North.

New patterns of corporate ownership

Shifting patterns of corporate ownership are also transforming the landscape of corporate power within the global economy. Increasing trends towards monopolization are affording growing power and dominance to a small handful of companies, such as the big tech companies, where the structure and logic of data-driven businesses (in terms of their network and scale effects) has created near-monopolies in the digital sector. As the number of firms reduces, their size is increasing, which generates less competition and more power, such as over prices, value distribution along the supply chain, and to set labour and environmental standards. To understand this growing market concentration requires considering not only the role of new technologies but also the investment patterns of financial institutions and how portfolio investing can work to reduce competition. Such developments overturn commonly held understandings of how markets work, and are causing political concern on both left and right and within international organisations as calls for new 'anti-trust' reforms grow louder.

Shifting geographies & technologies of consumption

Through their control over the means of production corporations play an essential role in how individuals and societies meet their everyday needs. Moreover, through advertising and branding they also have the capacity to shape individuals' consumer preferences, and through them their sense of identity. As such, consumption is a lens through which many people make sense of the economy, their place within it, and economic change. Today, companies are connecting in more frequent, direct, and subtle ways with consumers through digital and social media platforms with global reach (though with some exceptions, notably in China). By targeting advertising to shape (or manipulate) what consumers desire, platforms like Facebook and YouTube facilitate personalised interactions with corporations, helping to simultaneously create cultural homogeneity and ensure they feed off and are sensitive to cultural differences. As such, digital technologies are powerful tools that can be used by corporations to grow their customer base and protect and enhance their reputation.

New frontiers in political economy analyses of the corporation

The paradox of corporations is that they are ubiquitous yet our knowledge of their political economic behaviour is under-developed. Corporations undoubtedly wield immense political power, yet they are not all-powerful. What is more, while they all aim to maximise profit, enhance brand value, and expand market share, they are not monolithic, nor do they behave similarly across time, space, industry, and policy domain. Only concrete empirical research can uncover the extent and the

limits of corporate power today. How do corporations exercise their power in the contemporary global economy, and how do corporations interact with states and civil society? Does the evolving structure, size and organisation of corporations and their global supply chains necessitate new forms of corporate governance? What are the limits to corporate power? SPERI's research in this area aims to deepen our understandings of corporations and corporate power, the barriers these may pose to a stable, sustainable and equitable economy, and how such barriers can be overcome.

Labour & Decent Work

The nature of people's working lives throughout the global economy is changing fast. Profound shifts in the organisation of global production across recent decades have led to a major restructuring of labour markets throughout the world. Operating through vast networks of supplier firms, the structure of contemporary supply chains puts logistical, territorial and legal distance between capital (the wealth invested in production) and labour (the human input into the production process). Growing outsourcing, subcontracting and casualisation has contributed to the expansion and intensification of labour exploitation and forced labour across many industries and sectors, particularly in the often-informal lower rungs of global supply chains.

This is an important moment to study the power and organisation of labour and the lived experience of work. Whilst pay for those on high incomes is rising fast in many parts of the world¹, wage growth for many is stagnant.² There is growing realisation in large parts of the global North and South that the promise of globalisation to bring people out of poverty and raise living standards isn't being met for the majority of the population. The decade of 'post-crisis recovery' since 2008 raises serious questions about what decent work is today and who has access to it. Rising employment rates, as in the UK, often belie increases in part-time, short-term and low-paid work, and in-work poverty. This 'recovery' has contradictory macroeconomic implications, since under-employment and job insecurity, compounded by cuts to welfare, have a destabilising effect on consumption, which, in turn, slows GDP growth. In the era of austerity, public service cuts have underwritten a crisis in the provisioning of care needs – of "social reproduction" – the brunt of which is being borne by women, low-income households, and people of colour. Against a backdrop of increasingly punitive migration laws and restrictive border regimes, migrant workers are made disproportionately vulnerable. As such, the structure of the labour market, who accesses it and on what terms, and who is most vulnerable to precarious and exploitative forms of work, is not simply class-based, but racialised and gendered as well.

In this context, social, political and economic concern about the effects of fissured workplaces and the conditions, quality, and remuneration of work is growing. How to expand forms of decent work that are fairly paid, secure and where workers have voice and dignity has become a pressing question of our time. Evidencing and theorising the position of labour and the meaning of decent work in the global economy today is therefore a necessary and urgent task.

Contemporary work & production

It is impossible to understand the nature of work without analysing the character of production in the global economy. Over recent decades, the globalisation of supply chains, enabled by information and communication technologies, new transport systems and transnational corporate governance, have transformed the relationship between labour and capital. In a global economy dominated by large corporations with far-reaching production networks, international governance and regulatory norms have been reshaped to privilege business over workers. This has led to a significant redistribution of value upwards to corporations and away from workers. Put simply, while corporations and investors at the top of supply chains amass huge profits, workers – in both the global North and South – are

¹ R. Partington (2018) 'Pay rising faster for top 1% of earners in richest countries, says report', *The Guardian* <https://www.theguardian.com/business/2018/jul/04/pay-rises-faster-for-top-1-per-cent-of-earners-in-developed-world-report>

² OECD (2018), *OECD Employment Outlook 2018*, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/empl_outlook-2018-en.

taking home an ever-diminishing share of this income. For instance, recent SPERI research on tea and cocoa – two highly profitable agricultural commodities – found that tea and cocoa workers at the base of supply chains are taking home incomes just 25% and 30% of the poverty line respectively.³

This link between surging profits for business actors and investors and the spread and normalisation of indecent work is central to understanding modern labour markets. To maintain profits in an era of low investment and low growth, powerful downward pressures have been exerted by both states and business to cut labour costs and reduce the bargaining power of labour. Legislative efforts to curtail the power of organised labour have contributed to a rapid decline in trade unionism and collective bargaining in most developed economies. Many workers face severe constraints in exerting rights and power, and in some contexts, face violence and coercion in retaliation for exerting their rights and pushing for better conditions.

Over recent decades there has also been a sustained rolling back of states' roles in enforcing labour laws and standards. The state's retreat has increased the power of employers and has facilitated the proliferation of private, industry-led governance initiatives such as corporate social responsibility (CSR). Mounting evidence suggests that CSR is failing to address labour exploitation including forced labour in globalised production; while it may lead to limited improvements across less intractable challenges like health and safety, it tends to fall short on core dynamics such as wages, overtime, and collective action. CSR may also be obscuring the extent to which labour exploitation is rooted in the very structures and practices that comprise corporate business models, giving the impression that companies can solve problems like modern slavery without fundamentally transforming their purchasing practices. The scaling back of labour inspectorates has led some business actors within supply chains to interpret that it is viable (and potentially profitable) to break labour laws and that they can do so with impunity. In many countries, there is growing dislocation between what labour laws say – regarding the minimum wage, health and safety, and freedom of association, for example – and the atomised, insecure reality of work for many people.

Playing out over recent decades, these trends have enabled redefinitions of the nature of work and employment. The so-called 'gig economy' and associated forms of low-paid casualised work, often underpinned by internet technologies, normalise the idea that work is no longer a permanent arrangement; that everyone is or can be an independent contractor, and that a 'job' can be broken into tasks to be performed by multiple people. Under the cover of incentivising flexible working, risks and liabilities are passed from employers to individuals. In low-wage labour markets with low union density such forms of work can quickly take hold and can accelerate the hollowing out of mid-skill professional jobs, and cement the shift away from the standard employment relationship. The widespread socialisation and acceptance of these trends to casualisation have the potential to fundamentally redefine work throughout all tiers of the labour market and to enable businesses to further bypass the hard-won legal rights and benefits that they are mandated to provide to workers.

From indecent to decent work?

In the context of fragmented workforces and supply chains, how can labour rights and freedom from labour exploitation be achieved? There is no doubt that traditional forms of labour organising are still around and making gains. For instance, transnational unions have shown how to exert pressure at key nodes in the modern global production process, for example at docks and other critical logistics sites. Established unions and new worker organisations are also engaged in new forms of

³ G. LeBaron (2018) The Global Business of Forced Labour: Report of Findings, SPERI and the University of Sheffield <http://globalbusinessofforcedlabour.ac.uk/report/>

organising, including providing representation for freelance and 'crowdworkers' whose work does not fit traditional patterns nor is geographically bound to one site; the increased use of litigation to set labour law precedents; and applying pressure at sub-national and city levels to achieve higher labour standards. Another new development comes in the form of worker-driven social responsibility programmes which have been successful in redistributing greater profit down the supply chain to workers. Many of these newer forms of worker-driven solutions seem promising, but have as yet very little evidence or data behind them.

Empirically-driven research on 'What works?' to combat forced labour and exploitation in supply chains is therefore urgently required. In addition to the worker-driven initiatives described above, this needs also to include the effectiveness of legal⁴ and state-based initiatives, such as labour-related disclosure legislation⁵ and 'home state' regulation⁶ to bolster corporate accountability for labour exploitation in supply chains; the imposition of joint and shared liability, a mechanism in force in parts of the US, which makes companies liable for the acts of sub-contractors, labour agencies, and other intermediaries in their supply chains and in territories outside their home jurisdiction; and measures to impose human rights due diligence. Additionally, there is a need to investigate the effectiveness of public and private measures to address the root causes of labour exploitation in supply chains, such as by changing patterns of value distribution, empowering workforces, and through bottom-up efforts to reorganise supply chains in ways that address the structural drivers of exploitation.⁷

Multiple futures of work

There is much to learn from current debates about the 'future of work' in policy spheres. Yet it is also worth noting that these debates are often dominated by depoliticised and technocratic discussions about the potential of automation and artificial intelligence (AI) to transform work. Questions must also be raised about the potential of such technologies to concentrate capital ownership and reduce returns to labour. There is not a linear path towards a single 'future of work' but rather multiple potential futures.

In engaging with the political economic barriers to decent work in today's global economy, a focus on technology needs to be placed alongside the fundamental issues of living wages, workers' rights, the gendered and racialised nature of labour markets and patterns of exploitation. Political economy research on labour and work needs to address a wide range of factors: an analysis of companies and how they function, of migration and border regimes, of the opportunities and barriers for state involvement to raise labour standards, of the shifting geography of consumption and production, and of technological developments. Only by doing so can we fully understand the condition of labour in the global economy and identify ways to enable millions of people secure decent work.

⁴ A. Rühmkorf (2015) 'Global supply chains: the role of law? A role for law!', *openDemocracy Beyond Trafficking and Slavery hub*
<https://www.opendemocracy.net/beyondslavery/andreas-r%C3%BChmkorf/global-supply-chains-role-of-law-role-for-law>

⁵ N. Phillips, G. LeBaron and S. Wallin (2018) *Mapping and measuring the effectiveness of labour-related disclosure requirements for global supply chains*, IMF Research Department Working Paper n°32
https://www.ilo.org/global/research/publications/working-papers/WCMS_632120/lang--en/index.htm

⁶ G. LeBaron and A. Rühmkorf 'The domestic politics of corporate accountability legislation: struggles over the 2015 UK Modern Slavery Act', *Socio-Economic Review*, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ser/mwx047>

⁷ G. LeBaron, N. Howard, C. Thibos, and P. Kyritsis (2018). *Confronting Root Causes: Forced Labour in Global Supply Chains*. <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1KX7Rcfbw4SK4nh5RQmcZ-7fZho296bg6/view>

About SPERI

Sheffield Political Economy Research Institute (SPERI) is an international research institute at the University of Sheffield committed to developing and promoting new analysis and understanding of contemporary capitalism, and of the major economic and political challenges arising from it.

Extreme imbalances in wealth and power, financial instability, and environmental degradation mean there is an urgent need for fresh thinking about how contemporary economies work and the public policies which could achieve a more equal and sustainable society.

Our community of researchers, policymakers, journalists and practitioners seek to bring together the multidisciplinary expertise and partnerships needed to understand complex and long-term political-economic issues. We believe that rigorous and methodologically pluralist research is necessary to support economic change at local, national, regional, and global levels. SPERI puts a premium on the real-world relevance of academic work and on translating our research into feasible policy proposals and accessible public discourse.

Founded in 2012 by Professors Tony Payne and Colin Hay, SPERI builds on the University of Sheffield's rich tradition of global and comparative political economy, especially the activities of the Political Economy Research Centre established in 1994 and the journal *New Political Economy* founded in 1996 at the University.

SPERI values diversity in both intellectual and people terms. We are committed to recognising the important intellectual contributions that female, LGBTQ, racial and ethnic minority and international scholars make to the field of political economy.



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