

## Book Reviews

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Tom Vickers

### **Borders, Migration and Class in an Age of Crisis: Producing Workers and Immigrants**

Bristol: Bristol University Press, 2019, £60.00 hbk (ISBN: 9781529201819), 208 pp.

Reviewed by **Gianna Maria Eick** , University of Konstanz, Germany

In the past decade, discourses about crises around migration and welfare have increased and have become the focus of political and public debates across the US and Europe. *Border, Migration and Class in an Age of Crisis: Producing Workers and Immigrants* by Tom Vickers examines migration within capitalist political economy and unravels migration and welfare in the face of past financial crises. Informed by Marxist theory and using a mixed-methods approach, the book challenges common narratives around migration and problematises common differentiations between ‘migrants’ and ‘workers’. Using Britain as a case study, Vickers examines how these categories have been constructed and mobilised within discourses of a ‘migrant crisis’ and a ‘welfare crisis’ to enable capitalist exploitation further. Hereby, the book proposes alternative understandings of the relationship between borders, migration and class that provide a basis for solidarity.

Theoretically, Vickers takes a unique Marxist approach to reintegrate class formation into critical border and migration studies. With this, the book aims to unpack the connections between different forms of oppression within international capitalism. Methodologically, Vickers selects Britain as a case study where the importance of the nation-state in managing capital and migration policies are particularly pronounced and supported by populist movements. The book draws on a wide range of academic and non-academic literature, together with empirical research conducted by Vickers over 2013–2018. Among others, the empirical research includes surveys, in-depth interviews with migrants, statutory sector practitioners and grass-roots campaigners, as well as television documentaries.

Vickers shows that similar processes of exclusion exist around borders and welfare due to the national administration of capital. The overarching argument is that migration and welfare spending crises have been portrayed as an explanation for the everyday problems that large proportions of Britain’s population encounter, such as poverty, precariousness, and cuts in services and housing. However, according to Vickers, the ruling classes have been creating such false narratives that oppress the working class to further

gain capital and power. In line with this, one of the interviewed grass-roots campaigners from Newcastle observes: 'It very much seems like money is more important than people's lives round here' (p. 129). The book argues that without large independent working-class movements, the ruling classes are given free rein for such interventions. Therefore, Vickers identifies divisions, connections and commonalities among the working class as a foundation for increasing solidarity and resistance.

Vickers concludes that there are only two possible trajectories for Britain. On the one hand, Britain could remain capitalist, which would further increase the migrant–native divide and lead to increasing exploitation. On the other hand, Britain could radically break away from capitalism and create a system that can overcome the current crises and differentiations. In particular, Vickers demonstrates the importance of a revolutionary approach where regimes are organised based on people's needs, not on what is possible within capitalism. Currently, however, the capitalist crisis shows no signs of ending, and according to Vickers, we can expect new areas to open up for profitable exploitation that lead to ever sharper divisions.

While Vickers makes compelling contributions to the discipline, two potential areas for improvement can be identified. First, the book raises important questions about the future of national borders and welfare states, but practical solutions are not sufficiently explored. To address this, engagement with the literature on the Europeanisation of social rights could provide further insight as it deals with similar issues. Second, the book claims that any form of revived social democracy is not an option for the future because the capitalist crisis is far advanced, and the conditions that enabled past social-democratic systems are not met. It is not clear which conditions Vickers is referring to here. And perhaps this is the case for contemporary Britain. One could argue, however, that Britain cannot be compared to other (European) countries that do not have a liberal welfare system and are overall better positioned in terms of the rights of migrants and workers. Hence, we should be careful to generalise the results of this analysis.

Overall, Vickers offers a rigorous, detailed and highly engaging analysis of how Britain's border and migration regimes are organised through capitalism. It reveals the perspectives of (migrant) workers and unpacks the relationship between mobility and capitalism. The book is a valuable academic work for researchers, policymakers, and activists interested in exploring issues around global migration and social change.

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## **Immigrant Labor and the New Precariat**

Cambridge: Polity Press, 2020, £15.99 pbk, (ISBN: 9780745692029), 200 pp.

Reviewed by **Ben Ledger-Jessop** , Sheffield Hallam University, UK

With the stark increase of xenophobia, nationalism and populism in the Western world since the turn of the century, immigrants have been a primary scapegoat for a range of