

*Simon Clarke: an appreciation*

I'm very sorry not to be with you there in person today, but glad to be able to share with you some personal reminiscences of Simon. For me, Simon was in many ways the keystone of the stimulating and exciting intellectual and political life in the CSE and at Warwick in the 1970s and 80s. This wasn't defined by department or discipline, but went across the social sciences and beyond, as we aimed both to understand and change the world we were living in, which meant treating it as a totality. Simon was key to that effort because he had first studied economics, which was actually rare in the CSE, despite its name. This enabled him to formulate a critique of what he later called "the scientific pretensions of neoclassical economics, to show it up as the vacuous and pernicious ideology that it is". I was glad to find this quote in a [2014 interview](#) with Simon, and plan to start using it. He had then done a PhD in sociology, which characteristically made him a fierce critic of sociology too. I try to make a point now, when I criticise economic analyses to make clear that I am also critical of formalist legal perspectives.

So naturally, Simon was the mainstay of our collective self-education in Marxism. None of us had his range of knowledge or depth of insight, but we all brought our own contributions. Of course, as he stressed, this meant going back to the sources, and a reading group on Capital. We carefully went through all three volumes, rotating the duty of producing minutes of our discussions, which I probably still have somewhere. Most of us didn't go on to the Grundrisse, though I'm sure Simon did. But this didn't mean treating the texts as holy writ, but trying to understand them in the context of the time, both the politics and the ideas.

This provided a solid foundation for our subsequent discussions of more contemporary work, which Simon subjected to his usual rigorous analysis and critique. These were delivered with the same cheery confidence with which he commented on our own work, towards which he was always supportive and constructive. This was the intellectual equivalent of the jaunty encouragement of novice sailors on Draycote Water that John recounts, 'pull the line and waggle the stick a bit'. I remember that when I explained the conundrum that the giant multinationals dominating the world economy (then as now) from the legal perspective consisted of formally separate entities, he honed in on the importance of this, prompting me to a key line of analysis.

So it didn't surprise me to hear of his activities in Russia. This was after I had left Warwick, but I still saw Simon, often on New Year's Day group walks in the Warwickshire countryside. He regaled us, in his matter-of-fact way, with accounts of the realities of post-Soviet Russia and workers' organisations, and also the practicalities of organising a network of researchers, which included going around with a bag of cash from the ESRC to dole out as appropriate.

So, Simon was always our rock, reassuring and supportive. That's why it was such a shock back in the 80s when he had his sudden heart attack, during a lecture. To our great relief he pulled through, and soon he was cheerily among us again, even riding his bike in as usual from Earlsdon. Even now it's hard to believe that he won't be back. Rest in peace.