

Reading *Legitimation Crisis* During the Meltdown

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Abstract

Legitimation Crisis, first published in 1973, is perhaps Jurgen Habermas's most Marxist work. Indeed, Habermas had no compunctions about identifying himself as a Marxist at the time. While accepting much of Marx's analysis, *Legitimation Crisis* argues that key elements of Marx's theory need to be modified in light of the transformation of nineteenth century capitalism into "advanced capitalism," the state playing a far greater role in the latter than in the former. Habermas argues further that one can no longer assume that an "objective" economic crisis will produce the "subjective" change of consciousness sufficient to effect radical structural change. For such a subjective transformation to occur, an economic crisis must give rise to a "rationality crisis," which must lead in turn to a "legitimation crisis," which in turn must provoke a "motivation crisis." My presentation will examine Habermas's analysis in light of the current global economic crisis. I will go beyond Habermas to argue that we now know--as we couldn't have known in 1973--what the basic institutions of a viable post-capitalist economy should be.