

East Central Europe: The “Law” of Uneven and Combined Development

Thursday 21 May 2020, by [DAVIDSON Neil](#) (Date first published: 30 April 2018).

Since the 1990s there has been an upsurge of academic interest in Trotsky’s concept of uneven and combined development, but relatively little attention has been paid to its intellectual antecedents. These two articles reconstruct the sources and components of uneven and combined development, in particular the strategy of permanent revolution, the conditions for which it was intended as an explanation, and the theory of uneven development, which Trotsky had to extend in order to provide that explanation.

The first article moves between the concepts of permanent revolution and uneven development, tracing their historical development from emergence in the eighteenth century until the era of the first Russian Revolution. By this point a relationship between the two had begun to be established by Marxists on the centre and left of the Second International, and in turn made possible the formulation of the “law” of uneven and combined development.

The second article begins by reconstructing the theory of uneven and combined development from Trotsky’s own writings in relation to Russia. It then looks more closely at the notion of the “modern” which in Trotsky’s account combines with the “archaic” or “backward,” before arguing that role of modernity suggests that uneven and combined development has been a far more widespread process than solely in the Third World/Global South. Drawing attention first to the English exception, the article then surveys examples from both West and East before concluding with an assessment of the relative durability of both permanent revolution and uneven development in the twenty-first century.

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