



UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

Economics

Leeds University Business School

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4-6pm

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“Critical Realism in Social Research”

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Organised together with the Center for Employment Relations, Innovation and Change (CERIC)

ABSTRACT

Critical realism has become increasingly influential in employment relations research and has a presence across the human sciences. This article argues that the critical realist ontology has surface appeal for local and specific case study research but is fundamentally at variance with the nature of the capitalist system. Unlike the immediate appearances of a local and specific site such as the workplace, the main features of the capitalist system (commodities, money, capital, profits, wages, etc.) are analytically inseparable – they can only be defined and comprehended together as a unified whole. Consequently, the critical realist ontology of separable structures in interaction hinders comprehension of the capitalist system. In fact, critical realism corrupts an approach termed ‘systematic abstraction’ which can aid system-wide theory. Despite claims to the contrary, critical realism thereby obscures the system-wide significance of local and specific cases, blocking progress in social research.

All Welcome