

# Guest Essay: *Human Power is its own end—Karl Marx* Political Economy

July 29, 2025

By Muhammad Adel Zaky

## Preamble

Political economy is no longer taught. It has been buried alive in cold lecture halls that breed nothing but submission. It has ceased to be a science of conflict and has become a technique of erasure—no longer a tool for understanding history, but for denying its very existence. Under the hegemony of neoclassical economics, which sanctifies equilibrium and strips the human being of both class and history, the market becomes a natural law and reason reduced to a mere utility-calculating machine.

**In the Arab world, education—petrified within a suffocating bureaucracy—produces only colonized minds: it indoctrinates without inciting thought, recites instead of questioning, and rehearses the rituals of obedience within the temples of power. The university, designed to reproduce domination, cultivates no freedom; it codifies failure and imprints alienation**

This text is neither a complaint nor a set of recommendations: it is a declaration of rupture with the illusion of neutrality—a reminder that no liberation is possible without the radical insubordination of knowledge. It is an intellectual insurrection that seeks to restore political economy to its rightful place within thought, and to restore education to its natural vocation: emancipation.

## 1. The Neoclassical Break: From Critique to Erasure

If nineteenth-century political economy represented the maturation of European thought capable of transforming the capitalist mode of production into a “science,” what is today called “neoclassical economics”—through which students are intellectually executed in universities—is not a continuation, even in disguise, of that trajectory. It constitutes a radical epistemological rupture. From its very language, neoclassical theory is emptied of all historical dialectics. It presents capitalist social relations as natural, eternal, and neutral givens. Emerging from the theoretical crisis of classical political economy after Marx, it is not a continuation but a negation of it. Rather than analyzing class relations and the social structures that produce wealth, neoclassical economics retreats into an abstract and mathematical universe populated by supposedly rational individuals, where the market “balances itself” as if by natural law.

Its alleged neutrality—of the market, the state, and of science itself—is nothing more than an ideological mask. All science is a social and historical production; the claimed neutrality is merely a mathematized language in the service of the dominant order. The rationality it posits is simply the reflection of bourgeois reason, which sacralizes exchange and measures all things according to individual utility. Thus, economics becomes “the science of choice,” evacuating the fundamental questions: Who owns the means of production? Who produces? Who is exploited? In their place arise technical concerns over the “optimal allocation” of resources. This withdrawal from history expresses a deep desire to exclude conflict, deny contradiction, and beautify a world dominated by capital.

**The concept of equilibrium—so dear to this theory—is yet another mask: in this model, there is no chaos, no monopoly, no structural unemployment. Equilibrium is but an ideal image, a fantasy of an ordered universe, far removed from the unequal reality in which capital continuously accumulates wealth at the expense of labor. With Marshall and Walras, the neoclassical discourse acquired a new language to present economics as a “natural” science. Analysis no longer targets value or the origin of profit, but rather individual behavior. This shift has resulted in the complete erasure of political economy in favor of “economics”—or rather, a pseudo-science that says nothing about politics, power, or class.**

Neoclassical economics, taught as the sole and historical truth, aims to produce a kind of knowledge devoid of humanity, conflict, or memory. It is the technocratic face of an order that hides the interests of capital behind equations and graphs. Whereas Marxism sought to overturn reality to expose its contradictions, neoclassical thought does precisely the opposite: it conceals them, reproduces the established order, and presents it as the end of history. Its critique must therefore be neither technical nor partial; it must be radical and civilizational, one that restores political economy as the science of conflict—against the fable of a painless consensus.

## 2. Education and Organized Ignorance

On the peripheries of the global capitalist system—where structural disorganization meets authoritarian bureaucracy—education becomes one of the main pillars for reproducing subordinated knowledge and legitimizing the established order. The school, which ought to be the key to intellectual emancipation, has become a bureaucratic workshop for manufacturing obedient beings, conditioned to automatic submission to any form of authority. This system does not teach how to question; it teaches how to remain silent methodically. Its goal is not freedom of thought, but the reproduction of a frozen social structure through the imposition of a culture of obedience.

**How can an institution built on rote memorization and recitation possibly give rise to critical freedom? It recycles dead knowledge, imposes narrow boundaries upon the mind, all while presenting itself as a guarantor of civilization and progress. Schools and universities, far from being spaces of intellectual liberation, have become repetitive stages for a theater of indoctrination, where social inequalities and symbolic hegemony are re-enacted. The dominant criterion is neither understanding nor creativity, but the ability to repeat the sacred texts of power—like reciting an anthem before a tyrant.**

The system reproduces a colonized mindset through methods not so different from those once employed by colonizers to fabricate loyal servants. In this tragedy, the teacher becomes a victim of the bureaucratic machine. Deprived of the minimal conditions for dignified work, they are nonetheless expected to produce “conscious” generations, while they themselves remain captive to a culture of submission and routine. This system reproduces unemployment, stagnation, and mediocrity because it produces nothing but illusion and plants in minds a culture of resignation.

Education, in our wounded Arab world, is founded on the idea that future generations are tools for political stability—not citizens. This logic becomes a bitter reality when curricula consecrate an authoritarian mentality, preparing minds to accept rather than resist. No renaissance can emerge from the ruins of confiscated knowledge. Education that does not ignite the spark of creative doubt, that does not liberate the mind from authority, is nothing but a tool for manufacturing powerlessness and recycling submission.

### 3. The University as an Ideological Apparatus

Modern higher education does not simply mark a transition from “knowledge for knowledge’s sake” to “knowledge for the market.” From its very origins, it has served as an instrument of power in its ideological form: it produces illusion as much as diplomas, and subjugates minds as well as bodies. From its birth in the modern European city, the university’s mission was never emancipation, but the reproduction of dominant social structures, the stabilization of the division of labor, and the legitimation of modern myths of science.



**From its birth in the modern European city, the university has served as an instrument of power: it produces illusion as much as diplomas. In the image, the Oxford University in 1852. Public domain.**

The modern university is not neutral. It is one of the nerve centers of capitalist ideology: it sees in the human being only “human capital,” in knowledge only a tool of production, and in reason only an instrument of calculation. If the Church of the Middle Ages ruled through theology, the university rules today through rankings, quality standards, and

publication indices—modern seals of legitimation.

**In the Arab world, peripheral universities are often nothing more than distorted copies of their Western centers. Curricula are imported like merchandise, knowledge is recycled as an imitation of modernity, and students are “trained” as one trains machine operators. Just as dependent economies produce only dependence, the dependent university produces only alienation.**

What is needed today is not an administrative reform of the university, but a radical critique of its function, a dismantling of its structure, an exposure of its civilizational genealogy. We must break with the illusion that the university is a space of intellectual liberation, and understand that it is, in both structure and method, a cog in the machinery of domination. It produces the obedient specialist, not the free thinker; it trains for submission and marginalizes creativity. The university, in this sense, is not the house of knowledge, but the house of obedience.

## Conclusion

The pedagogical crisis of political economy is not an accident, but the reflection of a deeper structure in which knowledge and power dance together in an old choreography of domination. What is taught under the name of “science” is too often a reproduction of the capital’s point of view, a legitimation of the market as destiny. In universities that resemble

silent factories, the mind is molded in the image of obedience, and degrees become certificates of allegiance.

To liberate political economy from the neoclassical prison, to liberate education from its ideological tutelage, is not an intellectual luxury—it is a civilizational emergency. We must restore to knowledge its right to questioning and to struggle, or else continue to recycle misery under scientific disguises that, in truth, are nothing more than tools of repression.

## 23 thoughts on “Guest Essay: The Pedagogical Crisis of Political Economy”

1. **Ayman Zohry** says:

August 1, 2025 at 5:02 am

An excellent article...

2. **Muhammad Adel Zaky** says:

August 2, 2025 at 2:07 pm

Thank you so much, Professor Zohry. It truly means a lot to me that you took the time to read the essay. Your kind support and generous encouragement are both an honor and a source of motivation.

3. **I.Saad** says:

August 2, 2025 at 4:25 pm

Since this article brilliantly reflects its concerns regarding education and how it can be used to produce non-scientific facts which are presented to students as absolutes, I stress that what is criticized here, from the perspective of political economy, can also be found in philosophy as much as it can be found in engineering!

It is a crisis that encompasses both the educational sphere and our mechanism of thought (in the context of the Middle-East). The latter has more serious consequences because, in our case, our crisis lies in how we think, how we approach our problems. Therefore, it will be reflected in most of our intellectual endeavors without realizing that our path towards approaching our prolematics is the true cause of our backwardness.

4. **محمد عادل** says:

August 3, 2025 at 6:42 pm

Thank you, I. Saad, for this thoughtful and perceptive comment. Indeed, what you highlight goes to the heart of the matter: the pedagogical crisis I attempted to outline is not confined to the field of political economy. It is symptomatic of a deeper epistemological dysfunction—one that permeates our educational institutions and

extends to the very mechanisms of thought we employ in approaching reality. Your observation that the issue lies not only in what we teach but in how we think is both profound and unsettling. If our approach to knowledge is itself flawed, then all disciplines—whether in the humanities or the sciences—risk reproducing the same structural errors under different guises. This is particularly true, as you pointed out, in the context of the Middle East, where inherited forms of thought are too often mistaken for timeless truths. Thank you once again for your generous engagement with the essay. Your comment invites a much-needed expansion of the discussion toward the foundational structures of cognition and critique.

5. **Mounzer Salem** says:

August 4, 2025 at 9:15 am

Muhammad Adel Zaky's essay offers a powerful and provocative critique of contemporary education and economic thought, especially within the Arab world. He eloquently argues that neoclassical economics has transformed political economy from a critical science into a tool of ideological reinforcement, stripping it of its essential conflict and historical dimensions. This transformation, he contends, perpetuates a sanitized view of capitalism that obscures exploitation and inequality. Zaky's analysis of education as a mechanism of organized ignorance is particularly compelling. He highlights how institutions, rather than fostering critical thinking, serve to reproduce social hierarchies and obedience, effectively stifling revolutionary potential. His critique of universities as ideological apparatuses underscores the need for a radical overhaul of higher education, emphasizing that genuine emancipation requires dismantling these structures of domination. Overall, the essay is a call to reclaim knowledge as a site of resistance and liberation. It challenges us to rethink the role of education and economics, urging a return to their revolutionary roots rooted in conflict and emancipation. This piece is an urgent reminder that intellectual insubordination is essential for true societal transformation.

6. **Walaa** says:

August 4, 2025 at 9:22 am

Professor Dr. Mohamed Adel Zaki offers a brilliant reflection on the crisis of political economy as a discipline within educational institutions.

He explores the historical evolution of the field, and how it has been shaped by political agendas and individual interests.

Amid the strength of every word, I paused at this sentence that encapsulated so many profound meanings:

> "Education that does not ignite the spark of creative doubt, nor liberate the mind from constraints, is nothing more than a tool for manufacturing helplessness and reproducing submission."

## 7. Issa Issa says:

August 4, 2025 at 11:27 am

Dr. Mohamed Adel Zakki presents a bold diagnosis of the crisis in education and political economy in the Arab world, yet certain gaps warrant further discussion:

Strengths of the analysis:

1. Exposing false neutrality: His revelation of how class conflict is concealed behind neoclassical mathematics recalls Gramsci's warnings about turning ideology into natural laws.

2. Critique of civilizational alienation

His observation of imported curricula as "commodities" touches on the problem of Eurocentrism in knowledge production.

Critical questions to deepen the dialogue:

1. Concrete alternatives:

– How can political economy be transformed from a theoretical conflict into a tool for change within social movements?

– Is an epistemological break sufficient without building parallel educational institutions (e.g., people's schools, teacher cooperatives)?

2. The elite-centrism problem:

– Does the text reproduce an elitist discourse by portraying students as passive victims, overlooking their daily resistance (e.g., student protests, independent journals)?

3. The global context:

– How does alienated education in the Arab world differ from its forms in the Global South (e.g., Latin America, Africa), where liberatory pedagogies emerge despite dependency?

4. Technology and conflict:

– Can digital education tools serve a pedagogy of liberation, or are they inherently neoliberal instruments?

– Does the text overlook possibilities of internal subversion (e.g., how can critical teachers infiltrate official curricula)?

-The missing political economy: Why does the analysis neglect the role of international finance (e.g., World Bank, IMF) in shaping Arab curricula?

If education is indeed an "invisible shackle," how do we forge its keys? Do we break the locks, steal them, or reinvent them? These questions do not negate the analysis but call for grounding it in a vision that rebalances critique and action.

Issa Issa

August 5, 2025

## 8. Ekram elbadawy says:

August 4, 2025 at 11:52 am

This is a profound and well-structured article. It reflects deep understanding and offers insightful analysis, making it a valuable academic contribution.



9. **Sulaiman Alhukmiyya** says:

August 4, 2025 at 2:48 pm

I acknowledge that this is valuable and important material.

May your serious intellectual contributions continue, esteemed scholar.

10. **Ramez Salah** says:

August 4, 2025 at 3:33 pm

A bold and necessary essay Dr. Zaky. You expose how economics and education are used to silence thought instead of inspire it. Thank you for this powerful call to reclaim knowledge as a tool for liberation.

11. **Reham Motaz** says:

August 4, 2025 at 6:51 pm

A powerful and urgent essay.

Muhammad Adel Zaky's piece is not just a critique—it is an intellectual act of resistance. With piercing clarity, he exposes how political economy has been stripped of its critical essence and transformed into a sterile, technocratic language that masks inequality and silences dissent.

His argument transcends academia and speaks to a broader civilizational crisis: the weaponization of education as a tool for reproducing obedience rather than cultivating thought. Particularly in the Arab context, his indictment of bureaucratized pedagogy and imported curricula resonates deeply.

This essay is a timely reminder that knowledge is never neutral. The classroom is a battlefield, and the restoration of political economy as a science of conflict—not consensus—is not a scholarly preference, but a necessity.

Zaky's call for radical insubordination in both thought and institution is not simply provocative—it is profoundly necessary.

12. **Ali Nagaty** says:

August 5, 2025 at 3:40 am

I think this essay offers a bold, insightful, and radical critique of one of the core foundations of the civilizational crisis we face in the Arab world—namely, the deep entanglement between institutions of education, authoritarianism, and exploitation.

What stood out most to me is the way the article shows how, in teaching political economy, the university does not offer a true science, but instead transmits a set of framed tools and techniques that ultimately serve to sustain a system treated as a meta-historical given.



This is not unique to political economy. We've seen the same pattern across other fields in the humanities. Yet, because political economy deals directly with the management and distribution of wealth, its distortion becomes the most critical and dangerous expression of the Arab mind's subjugation—as part of the broader subjugation of Arab reality itself.

This is a precise and much-needed critique, refreshingly distinct from most of what is circulated within Arab academic discourse.

It seems urgent that we begin to rethink the role of those institutions we continue to treat as educational, when in fact they function as mechanisms for the reproduction of authoritarianism.

13. **Ghada Moussa** says:

August 5, 2025 at 11:12 am

The author is right in stating that the science of Political Economy ceased to exist with K. Marx's scientific work "Das Kapital".

How Political Economy is taught in developing and underdeveloping universities constitute an issue. It was redreved in the impact of political decisions on economic policies. This notion and writings of political economy concentrate on local and international levels. We often hear terms like International Political Economy or the Political Economy of Environment...etc. Those terms reflect the dilemma of political economy and the hegemony of the Chicago school on the term itself and the methods and tools applied in teaching it. It is mostly apparent in universities in developing countries who failed to de-colonize its disciplines. Scholars of Economics do not relate political economy to neoliberal discourses, although they strongly believe in the latter but in absence of its social aspects. Whereas scholars of political science emphasize its socio-political aspects in isolation of the capitalist mode of production. Both scholars are faced with ontological challenges. They still fail to overcome it due to their ontological dependency on the West.

The author rightly described this dependency and how it influences academia, policymaking and interests. Though I may disagree with him in considering "neoliberalism as an ideology".

I think the article is important since it raised profound issues and dilemma that need to be complemented and addressed thoroughly and in further articles.

14. **Muhammad Adel Zaky** says:

August 6, 2025 at 7:19 pm

I would like to express my deep gratitude to everyone who took the time to read, reflect on, and respond to this essay. Every comment—whether supportive, critical, or inquisitive—has been a valuable contribution to a conversation that I believe is both urgent and collective.

To those who offered kind words of encouragement and resonated with the call to reclaim education as a space of emancipation: thank you. Your words are a powerful

reminder that critique is not isolation—it is dialogue, solidarity, and shared struggle. To those who raised essential questions about praxis, alternatives, and blind spots—particularly Issa Issa and Ghada Moussa—I truly appreciate your intellectual generosity. You touched on issues that deserve further elaboration well beyond the boundaries of a single essay. Indeed, any critique that does not also reflect upon its own silences risks reproducing the very logic it seeks to denounce. Your interventions are invitations to deepen and expand the discussion.

This text was never meant to be a conclusion, but rather a rupture—a starting point. It is not a blueprint, but a provocation. What we need today is not only critique, but construction: of alternative institutions, epistemologies, and practices capable of resisting commodified thought and reclaiming knowledge as a tool for liberation. Let us continue this dialogue—not within the confines of academic rituals, but in the living spaces where thought meets struggle.

I also extend my sincere thanks and appreciation to the News and Letters Committees platform for hosting this text and providing space for critical reflection and meaningful contribution. Publishing this essay on a platform with such a legacy of commitment to emancipation and radical thought is truly an honor. With deep respect and appreciation.

15. **Mohammed Aber** says:

August 17, 2025 at 4:04 pm

Dear Dr. Mohamed Adel Zaki,

Your article confronts, with remarkable boldness, the illusion of neoclassical “neutrality”, while at the same time exposing the depth of the crisis afflicting not only our educational institutions but even our research structures. In these spaces, intellectual freedom is often replaced by rote instruction and submission; classrooms become arenas of mental programming rather than places for questioning, reflection, and genuine inquiry. Students are driven to memorize rather than to critique, to consume and regurgitate information rather than generate and develop it, while the role of the teacher is reduced to enforcing pre-packaged curricula instead of inspiring independent thought.

Your style fuses depth with sharpness, reminding us that knowledge is never neutral nor complacent, and that true education cannot be built on blind obedience but must be an act of liberation and consciousness, one that rests on reflection, questioning, and a rationality freed from intellectual chains.

The way you unmasked neoclassical economics as a technocratic disguise serving the interests of capital was deeply compelling, and your call to reclaim political economy as a science of struggle struck me as both urgent and necessary. This is precisely the spirit we continuously advocate for in many intellectual and academic circles.

The section on education, in particular, resonated profoundly with me, for it reflects an essential dilemma shared by both students and teachers: the suffering of learners and educators trapped within systems that rely on mechanical methods of instruction, producing stagnant and pre-programmed minds rather than inquisitive ones. Instead of fostering the intellectual curiosity that gives birth to transformative ideas, these systems suffocate it. For this reason, your article reads as far more than a critique; it is a call for intellectual independence, an insistence on a mind that produces, develops, and resists all forms of thought-enslavement.

In conclusion, I would like to thank you for this article, which I regard as a spark, an invitation to revive critical thinking once more, and a call to transform and renew education by anchoring it in thought and reflection, not rote instruction.

16. **Muhammad Adel Zaky** says:

August 18, 2025 at 8:25 pm

Dear Dr. Mohammed Aber, I am truly grateful for your generous and thoughtful words, which were both encouraging and inspiring. It gives me great satisfaction to know that my article resonated with your reflections on the crisis of education and on the illusion of neoclassical neutrality. Your appreciation reinforces the importance of continuing the struggle to revive political economy as a critical and emancipatory science. Your comment is not only an expression of support but also a valuable contribution to the dialogue that I believe we must keep alive. It strengthens my conviction that serious intellectual work must aim at liberation, reflection, and the renewal of critical thought. With sincere respect and appreciation.

17. **Mohammad Aglan** says:

August 21, 2025 at 2:30 am

The merit of Dr. Adel Zaki's writings lies primarily in their capacity to address the core of the issues under examination. Many writings tend to remain at the surface level, which can mislead the reader contrary to the expected role of scholarship. Academic writing is expected to function as a means of shedding light on the path to knowledge, and this is precisely what Dr. Zaki accomplishes. He provides a clear analytical focus on the depth of the epistemological problem. I extend my sincere appreciation to Dr. Zaki for his valuable insights and contributions.

18. **Mohamed yousry** says:

August 21, 2025 at 3:55 am

Dear Dr. Mohammed Adel Zaky, I am grateful for your important article, which shed light on the dialectical relationship between formal education and politics in Arab universities.

I hope you write more on this topic, as it is important to the Arab reader. My regards and love.

**19. Muhammad Adel Zaky says:**

August 22, 2025 at 2:18 am

I sincerely thank everyone who contributed with their comments. The richness of dialogue is no less important than the text itself, for it is your engagement that gives it renewed life beyond the written words.

**20. Shane Hopkinson says:**

August 27, 2025 at 7:16 am

Dear Dr Muhammad

Thank you for your essay on the \*pedagogical crisis of political economy\*. I appreciate the passion with which you raised the issue, especially your insistence that education is never neutral and that teaching economics always carries ideological weight.

At the same time, I was left wondering what is really at stake in calling for a revival of political economy today. Most people—including mainstream economists—would probably agree that neoclassical economics is abstract and ahistorical, so the challenge seems less to point that out than to ask \*why\* this mode of thought remains hegemonic, and what it means for the Left.

I would be very interested to hear more about how you see the crisis of political economy relating to the broader crisis of Marxism and of the Left itself.

Regards,  
Shane

**21. Muhammad Adel Zaky says:**

August 27, 2025 at 9:35 pm

Dear Shane,

Thank you very much for your valuable response to my essay. Your question struck me because it touches the heart of the matter: the issue is not simply to show that neoclassical economics is abstract and ahistorical—that is already well known and often repeated—but rather to ask why it continues to dominate, and what this dominance means for the Left.

From my perspective, the crisis of political economy is directly connected to the broader crisis of Marxism and of the Left. The academic shift from political economy to neoclassical economics was not merely a change in curricula; it was also a political transformation, linked to the retreat of revolutionary projects and the restriction of critical traditions. Thus, calling for a revival of political economy is not about restoring an academic discourse, but about reclaiming a way of thinking that situates economic phenomena within their social, historical, and political contexts. This is why I emphasize the seriousness of the pedagogical crisis: when economics

is presented to students as a neutral, technical science, they are deprived from the outset of the tools to understand capitalism as a social relation. By contrast, reviving political economy is inseparable from renewing Marxism as a living critical thought, and from enabling the Left to reconstruct its project in a historical moment marked by profound crisis.

I look forward to continuing this discussion with you.

Warm regards,

Muhammad Adel Zaky

22. **Djilali Mahmoudi** says:

December 11, 2025 at 12:49 am

Dr. Muhammad Adel Zaky's essay confronts the pedagogical crisis of political economy with rare clarity and courage. It exposes how education, far from being a space of emancipation, has become a mechanism for producing obedience, colonized minds, and abstract knowledge divorced from history, class, and social reality. The university, once imagined as a place of critical inquiry, is revealed as an ideological apparatus that legitimizes power rather than questions it. What resonates profoundly is the call to reclaim knowledge as a tool of liberation, to resist the comforting illusion of neutrality, and to restore education to its true vocation: awakening thought, nurturing doubt, and cultivating freedom. This essay is not merely critique—it is a summons to intellectual insubordination, a reminder that emancipation begins in the mind before it can transform the world.

23. **Djilali Mahmoudi** says:

December 11, 2025 at 9:51 am

Dr. Muhammad Adel Zaky's essay is a mirror held up to the soul of education: it reflects not only what is taught, but how the act of teaching itself can imprison or liberate the mind. The real crisis is not only the absence of critical political economy, but the normalization of obedience and the erasure of historical consciousness. This piece is a call to awaken thought, to transform classrooms into spaces of intellectual courage, and to reclaim knowledge as a weapon of liberation rather than a tool of submission.

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