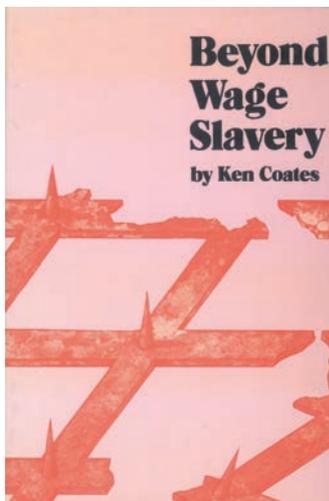


## Discovery

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*The author is compiling a bibliography of Ken Coates' many writings. This brief introduction to the Memorial Lecture is based on his article 'Ken Coates and socialist renewal', which appeared in Spokesman 128.*

In October 2012, I 'discovered' Ken Coates. I say 'discovered', but in fact I'd heard of Ken more than ten years before, in connection with anti-war campaigning. What I really mean is that I started to read and think about Ken's very many books, articles and his political activities.

The circumstances of this discovery are worth re-telling, if only because they demonstrate the reach and enduring influence of Ken's ideas. Leo Panitch, the Canadian political economist, visited Nottingham to deliver a lecture on his book *The Making of Global Capitalism*. At the opening of the lecture, he asked: 'who in the audience has heard of Ken Coates?' Despite knowing the name, I didn't raise my hand. Neither did anyone else in the room.

Panitch went on to explain that the last time he visited Nottingham was in the 1970s whilst completing his PhD and the sole purpose of the trip was to meet Ken. On this recommendation, I ordered a copy of Ken's collection of essays, *Beyond Wage Slavery*, and was captivated. Two things impressed me about the essays. Firstly, the constant challenges to the reader: 'what next?', 'if we can't do this what can we do?', 'why not?' These essays are no meander around some aspect of history or theory; they are sharply written expositions with a practical purpose in mind. Secondly, the range of ideas covered in *Beyond Wage Slavery* spoke of a socialist actively engaged in a wide range of issues.

First and foremost, through these essays Ken is addressing himself to the Labour Movement. The purpose of his writing is not to mobilise some lacuna of collective

thought and compliance but to challenge and organise activity in the movement as a whole. As I was to discover, from the early 1960s onwards Ken was involved in efforts to mobilise, organise and educate the Labour Movement on a socialist basis.

Throughout the 1960s, Ken and a growing band of comrades worked to make socialist ideas relevant to the realities of the movement in Britain, launching sharp interventions into the living and breathing organisations of this movement. Ken's considered attack on the Wilson Government's supplicant relationship with the United States over its war on Vietnam was not simply the outraged response of a morally offended individual, but the expression of a growing movement of discontent. The Institute for Workers' Control was not a political front marshalling imaginary battalions, but an organic expression of a substantial movement within the trade unions and Labour Movement more widely.

Ken's diverse activities were guided by a perspective that was rooted in the working class movement, informed by international events and concerns, inspired by contemporary intellectual developments, but driven by the imperative to make ideas a reality. He does not provide all of the answers to all of the questions we now face, but Ken's work – his voluminous writings and political initiatives – is a vital reference point for those of us determined to build and renew the socialist movement in Britain. It is a vital reference point for those of us who see the connections between the continuing drive to war, environmental degradation, economic crisis, social cruelty, and political dishonesty.

Ken Coates' work is important because it demonstrates the historical existence of 'another socialism': a socialism rooted in practical reality, informed by international concerns and a sense of moral urgency. The work of renewing socialism can find no more powerful reference point than this.

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*Professor Andreas Bieler's account of the inaugural Ken Coates Memorial Lecture is available online, together with other useful links to his work on trade unions and global restructuring:*

*<http://andreasbieler.blogspot.co.uk/2015/06/the-future-of-left-where-next-for.html>*