

Presenter: Moishe Postone, University of Chicago

Title: **“Anti-Semitism in the Contemporary World”**

Panel: Political Studies

My talk attempts to clarify the nature of modern anti-Semitism and distinguish it from other forms of racism. Understanding their differences helps us comprehend the contemporary world and has important political consequences. It will treat anti-Semitism first with reference to its self-understanding – as an anti-hegemonic worldview that seeks to combat “forces” that appear mysterious and outside of normal human control. This worldview, I argue, cannot be understood in psychological terms or as a matter of subjective “attitudes.” Rather, I argue, it is a response to deep transformations effected by the historical dynamic of capital. At the same time, a theory of capital can help explain the historical conditions of possibility of that form of subjectivity – of that worldview and the multiple forms of violence it generates.

The paper will also address how some widespread forms of anti-Zionism today are informed by an essentially anti-Semitic worldview in ways that have led to a great deal of conceptual confusion regarding Israel and the Middle-East.

By focusing on both with reference to capital, the paper will seek to give content to the well-known characterization a century ago of anti-Semitism as the socialism of fools as well as to the more recent description of many forms of anti-Zionism as the anti-imperialism of fools.