Critique on contemporaneous capitalism comes in two ideal types. First, economists like Krugman, Piketty and Stiglitz reject a certain aspect of the system, be it austerity, inequality or the euro. Although critique may be fierce, these neo-Keynesians do not reject capitalism as such. Sánchez Bermúdez instead endorses a second, post-Marxian perspective in which the capitalist system as a whole is critically analysed. This enables seeing the general pattern, which – as the title suggests – is neoliberal and seeks to dominate.

Sánchez Bermúdez’s account of neoliberalism is part historical description, part sociological analysis. He understands capitalism as a historical system with three historical stages: the liberal, the Keynesian and the neoliberal (current) one. The Keynesian stage ended in the 1970s; it was the contained form of capitalist domination. It resulted from a truce between capital and labour. The Keynesian state was a bargaining site for capital and labour. This contained form was still capitalistic because the means of production were separated from the labour force. For all its varieties capitalism is defined by commodification of the labour force: workers are forced to sell their labour power.

The neoliberal stage differs as capital does not negotiate anymore. Neoliberalism has to be understood as a “global offensive against the workers to re-establish the conditions for the production of surplus-value”. It is a counterrevolutionary project to dismantle the Keynesian truce and resurrect the liberal stage.

The assault on labour has several fronts. On the economic front workers seek employment according to the logic of the auction. States are disciplined by capital via the threat of withdrawal of funds. This cannot be politically
contested, because democracy has been hollowed out. Political power has been moved to inter- and supra-state institutions without democratic legitimacy. The remaining domestic electoral processes are decided by political marketing. This is in turn linked to the ideological hegemony of capital: education and mass media monopolise the public sphere. This all results in a society that is subordinate to the ultimate goal of becoming attractive to capital. Competition between individuals replaces social coexistence; social atomisation and political passivity result.

The Keynesian countervailing powers are impotent or have switched sides. Reformist parties and unions respond to the needs of capital and have become the main bastions of the new order. In the Keynesian era social-democrats and unions kept the masses passive and as such laid the foundation for the neoliberal backlash. Unions are ruled by a conservative bureaucracy and the disorganised and passive citizens have seized to be a threat to capital.

Sánchez Bermúdez states that ideological liberation is necessary to oppose capital. Capital as a whole needs to be contested, not a specific company or feature. Socialism’s aim is the destruction of the capital relation.

Whether one finds Sánchez Bermúdez’s analysis relevant—or even interesting—will depend on how one understands science and politics. Mainstream scientists will object that there are no tested—or even testable—hypotheses and that normative statements should not be mixed up with scientific accounts.

The author indeed clearly rejects capitalism. However, the analysis itself does not depend on that. One can share the analysis, while simultaneously dismissing socialism. One reason for doing so—not addressed in the book—is the conservative position that every revolution fails. In any case, Sánchez Bermúdez’s account never becomes a political pamphlet and is strictly analytic. Neo-Popperians will argue that the book is still not scientific due to the lack of testable hypotheses. But this is a narrow view of what science entails. Sánchez Bermúdez argues that capitalism should be understood as a whole. Testing isolated propositions does not cut it then. Indeed Popper’s falsification-principle is relevant solely in controlled experiments. Outside laboratories, no hypothesis can be tested in isolation, only a body of hypotheses can (Duhem-Quine critique). This is all the more relevant in historical analyses. Causes for the shift from the Keynesian to the neoliberal stage cannot be ‘tested’ for it only happened once. If one truly understands the political economic system as a whole, then econometric techniques break down and historical analysis remains.

_The Neoliberal Pattern of Domination_ is a compelling, convincing and relevant historical account, both detailed and profound. Sánchez Bermúdez does