

Overview of Projects on Peripherization of Balkan Countries, supported by RLS SOE

Organization: Center for Labour Studies - CRS, Zagreb, Croatia

Website: <http://radnickistudiji.org/>

Project title: "Two decades after the end of socialism: European integration, the (new) international division of labor and shifting regimes of reproduction of labor power in the post-yugoslav context"

Year: October, 2012.

Place: Zagreb, Croatia

Context analysis: All successor states of Yugoslavia have traveled along broadly similar trajectories, both with regard to socio-economic development, and their political and ideological framing and interpretation in mainstream discourse. Socio-economically, the restoration of capitalist relations of production, in combination with a progressive assimilation to (neo)liberal market regimes with the EU and other capitalist core regions, has led to widespread deindustrialization, social polarization and rising indebtedness (both public and private). These processes have been strengthened institutionally and ideologically via reference to the necessities of 'modernization' along neoliberal lines. The ultimate political goal of 'European integration' shared amongst most members of the political and intellectual elites of Yugoslavia's successor states has functioned both as driving force and last instance of legitimation of these processes. At the same time, the social implications capitalist restoration and the subscription to a broadly neoliberal 'modernization' agenda (encouraged and actively promoted by MMF led 'structural adjustment' and EU guidelines on policies favoring a deepening of market-based 'solutions' to economic and even social issues), have largely been left politically unquestioned and inadequately theorized. The ideological criminalization of Marxism, due to its association with Yugoslav socialism, and the parallel and related rise of nationalism in the late eighties and nineties, has effaced and almost entirely obfuscated the question of class – ironically, precisely at the point of its historical reemergence as immediate social reality. Intellectual conformism and a general climate of ideological suppression of anti-capitalist ideas and traditions of thought have played a significant role in the suppression of issues related to class and social justice. The ebbing of the nationalist tide, however, did in no way improve this situation. It was rather the (neo)liberal intelligentsia that managed to establish itself both as opposition and alternative to nationalism. In the process, socialist ideas were again ideologically denounced, as merely another shape of 'collectivist totalitarianism', allegedly closely ideologically related to nationalism.

Only in recent years, has this double deadlock and marginalization of the Left been to some extent broken. In Croatia especially by an emerging student movement vocally critical not only of neoliberal university reforms, but of capitalist social relations in general. CRS's conference expects to contribute to the deepening and theoretical consolidation of this new 'New Left', and to provide it with a significant platform for serious theoretical and political debate on issues we consider the most pressing and politically relevant for the region as a whole. The deepening of personal contacts amongst participants and the intense intellectual debates will surely facilitate its maturing and broadening.

Activities:

Conference: purpose is to gather critical researchers from various successor states of the former Yugoslavia to present research on the subject of the pattern of economic integration of the successor states into European and world capitalism, the new international division of labor established after the demise of really existing socialism, and the nature of changes in regimes of reproduction of labor power in this geo-economic context. 2 keynote speakers and 12 additional researchers from the region and beyond held lectures and debate the relevant issues.

Speakers: Vladimir Cvijanović - CRO, Mislav Žitko - CRO, Heiko Bolldorf - DE, Primož Krašovec - SL, Joachim Becker - AUT, Marko Kržan - SL, Sašo Furlan - SL, Anej Korsika - SL, Domagoj Mihaljević - CRO, Lilijana Burcar - SL, Toni Prug – GB-CRO.

Discussed questions:

- the centre/periphery divide, with EU core countries as the former, and the successor states of Yugoslavia as new, outer periphery;
- EU integration as ideology and/vs 'really existing process';
- the nature of regimes and strategies of accumulation dominant in the former Yugoslav republics and their relation to strategies of accumulation dominant in the core countries of the EU;
- the question of the relation between increasing financialization and deindustrialization;
- the problem of EU integration and its relation to neoliberalization;
- the question of the Yugoslav past and continuities/dis-continuities with it, especially in the light of pro-market reforms and their economic, political and ideological role in the legitimation of capitalist restoration on the one hand, and/vs
- resources it may possibly still provide – historical, theoretical and political – to challenge the present consensus on the inevitability of neoliberal economic and social solutions;
- shifts in the dominant regimes of reproduction of labor power, including: social, economic and political implications of the historical abandonment of social/welfare state arrangements in favor of 'neoliberal regimes' of reproduction of labor power;
- the question of the shifting structure between wage labor and reproductive labor and the related question of a gender based division of labor, i.e. the contemporary status of the class/gender divide question and its social, economic and political implications;
- the problem of rising unemployment in relation to these tendencies and their functionality/dis-functionality with regard to the imperatives of capitalist accumulation on the one hand, and social reproduction on the other;
- the economic roots and political implications of a historically quantitatively growing reserve army of labor;

Publication: collection of articles (conference inputs) to be published in Croatian language by the end of 2013.

Organization: Center for Politics Of Emancipation – CPE, Belgrade, Serbia

Website: <http://pe.org.rs/>

Project title: “Stuck on the periphery: key questions for left-wing politics”

Year: 2013

Place: Belgrade, Serbia

Context analysis: After the collapse of the socialist project, the region of Southeast Europe is being affected by rapid processes of neoliberal transformation. In the countries of the former SFR

Yugoslavia these processes have additionally been affected by the war confrontation and the strengthening of the nationalist ideology. Serbia represents a special case, because the regime, which was involved in the war, declared itself as left-wing. This has caused the ideological confusion that has resulted in the current antagonism toward the Left in the general population.

Advancing of neoliberal processes, primarily in the form of privatization of the economy, deregulation of markets and commodification of all kinds of goods resulted in intensification of social polarization. Under the mask of 'creating the better business climate' and 'attracting foreign investments' as the only possible way in which the economy can operate, the political and economic power had been concentrated in the hands of the ruling minority. At the end of the first and the start of the second decade of the twenty-first century these processes have been additionally emphasized with the overall crises of capital accumulation and austerity measures in response to it. This mainly affects the part of population that has been labeled as 'the losers of the transition', which is usually presented as a minority, while in fact they represent the majority of society: workers, students, marginalized groups, beneficiaries of social programs, aged, youth etc.

Despite the deteriorating situation, the hegemony of neoliberal concepts, in which the abovementioned processes are being marked as inevitable, remains solid. In the meantime, far-right organizations, which have strengthened due to ethnic conflicts in former SFR Yugoslavia, are trying to exploit discontent and play the card of unresolved national issues. However, this attempt cannot be considered as a real alternative because through the exploitation of the national sentiment the basics of the socio-economic relations are not being affected. Instead, the only interests that are being met are the interests of the domestic elite.

The problem of the current processes cannot be resolved without a critical examination of the very foundations of this system. In order to do this it is necessary to reaffirm the class analysis and politics, which could oppose the neoliberal hegemony. Therefore, the only real alternative is on the left side of the political spectrum. However, the abovementioned specific socialist legacy and tremendous offensive of neoliberal ideology has produced the demonization of left-wing ideas and politics and greatly reduced the possibility of articulation of the left-wing alternative.

One of the aims that our Project will strive to achieve is the long term process of revitalization of leftist concepts in general by permanent introduction of progressive political ideas, theories and socio-politically active practices. In the post-socialist societies there is a myth that the neoliberal economy and social philosophy is the only salvation key to the gates of the future. In most educational institutions the knowledge that is being produced keeps up with this dominant ideological frame. Since the formal education is enabling an adherence to the status quo there is a need for new perspectives that differ and critically analyze contemporary processes in order to fill the gaps made by formal educational institutions.

Therefore the project is oriented towards generating the theoretical and practical knowledge of leftist perspectives through the application and dissemination of critical ideas, concepts, practices and activities. Lectures, which we provided in our Summer School in 2012 and which we want to provide in 2013 as well, aim to help participants to become critical actors. We are achieving this by providing a basic conceptual framework and analytical tools for their practical political work. The second Project activity which we want to implement aim to provide permanent political and theoretical education on the topics important for the context of contemporary Serbian society and other Balkan societies. We will organize lectures by theoreticians and researchers in order to form analytical frame which allows thinking of the current social and political issues from a different point of view than dominant ideology imposes.

Activities: Series of public lectures

Five public events within one main topic – analysis of peripherization processes of East European post-socialist countries. The events will be collectively named “Stuck on the periphery”.

The main goal of these events is to provide space for open discussions on the issues of contemporary socio-economical and political problems with the overview of the recent historical processes. In the context of neoliberal hegemony it is of great importance to offer alternative interpretations of current situation and recent past. With these events we also want to encourage development of possible alternative directions in which our society could move.

Topics:

The contemporary crisis of capitalism and neoliberal offensive – Primož Krasovec (Slovenia)

The welfare state and neoliberal offensive – Asbjørn Wahl (Norway)

The restoration of capitalism in post-socialist countries - Catherine Samary (France)

The effects of contemporary crisis on the public service sector – Ursula Huws (GB)

The contradictions of socialist societies and the fall of socialism - Michael Lebowitz (Canada, Cuba)

The worker's strikes in the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia during the eighties - Goran Musić (Austria, Serbia)

Serbian society as new, outer periphery in the context of the global capitalistic system - Boris Kagarlitsky (Russia)

Professionalization of the social movements – Hillary Wainwright (GB)

It's Class-Politics! The Capitalist Offensive as Euro-Crisis and the Left – John Miliotis (Greece)

Organization: Institute for Labour Studies – ILS

Website: <http://www.dpu.si/en>

Project title: “Workers and Punks’ University: Return of the Political Economy”

Year: 2013

Place: Ljubljana, Slovenia

Context analysis: The conference titled Marxist Political Economy and Democratic Socialism for the 21st Century and a release of a new Slovenian translation of the Marx’s Capital will be organized at the most appropriate time. Currently, the ruling government coalition is in the advanced phase of the implementation of its draconian austerity programme, headed by the privatization of government-owned banks and companies along with cuts in the welfare state expenditures. On the other hand, the disoriented electoral body is protesting weekly against the ruling political and economic elites, but is not able to offer an alternative programme for a transformation of the national political and economic system. Academics and other intellectuals, which could potentially be equal to this task, are either anemic in their critique or outright apologists of the ruling government’s measures. Therefore a loud and convincing intellectual intervention is needed as badly as ever.

The 2012 WPU May Day School (The Future of European Integration: Left Perspectives) came to the conclusion that one cannot fully grasp the regional expressions of the double crisis of the European integration and global capitalism without considering its overdetermination by its specific history of the transition from socialism to capitalism and its aftermath. To this end, The 2013 May Day School will be devoted to the problem of primitive accumulation of capital in the (post-) transition period, both from the conceptual and analytical perspectives.

But even more crucial point for the importance of the theme - primitive accumulation - chosen for our May Day School is a need for a coherent and insightful study of the economical development in Slovenia and other Eastern European countries, through transition from a Yugoslav socialist system to a capitalist system and EU integration.

It is very symptomatic that the story of the great historical break of 1989 in Eastern Europe is usually articulated predominantly in purely political terms, often with obvious romantically-nationalistic overtones: winds of change swept away old curtains and walls of the obsolete system and enabled a second spring of nations, which were at last able to breathe freely and democratically. Topics of the concurrent economical and social transformation are usually given much less attention and tend to be very briefly summed up under vague notion of 'liberalization'. In any case, all these transformations were also supposed to have a determinate final goal, namely the accession to EU, which would extend its friendly hands towards the newly independent neighbors and guide them in the task of constructing democratic institutions.

However, if we assume a more sober perspective, it quickly becomes obvious that, considering the new political-economical reality, the absolutely crucial social 'institution', which the Eastern European countries certainly lacked, was a proper capitalist class. So one of the aims of the May Day School is therefore to trace the patterns of socio-economic transformations in Slovenia and Eastern Europe between the collapse of Soviet Union and accession of countries to the EU. What was the interaction of former state property, foreign capital and newly emerging capitalist class? Did the latter truly emerge - as was perhaps hoped for - smoothly and spontaneously, solely by the force of newly unleashed entrepreneurial energy? Or did a shadier process take place, which was much closer to Marx's description of 'primitive accumulation' - namely, a process of violent expropriations?

We also need to know the history of similar developments in other parts of the world. The coup d'état that overthrew the elected Socialist government in Chile in 1973 and the subsequent reforms, the "structural adjustments" that were brought to perfection by the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the US Secretary of the Treasury in the 1980s and 1990s to the detriment of Latin American, African, East Asian, and Central and East European victims, the similarly cruel arrangements that are today being enforced upon the working masses of the periphery of the European Union (EU) by the new institutional democratic control circumventing Troika (the IMF, the European Commission, and the European Central Bank) – all these examples show that even the "end of history," with its predominance of the supposedly inseparable pair of the market and parliamentary democracy, takes as its historical point of departure the raw violence of the non-economic means of accumulation of capital.

All these examples are quaintly similar to those described by Marx in the final chapters of the first volume of Capital. The concept of the original, primitive, or primary accumulation had been used by political economists to explain, above all, the initial period in the history of British capitalism, when the state used the non-economic means such as the enclosure of the commons to separate the workers from their means of production, thereby satisfying the key condition for the rise of capitalist relations of production. Marx himself stated that the chapters on the primitive accumulation are only "historical sketches" without a conceptual claim. Yet there were some among

his followers who thought that primitive accumulation should be understood not as a concluded historical period but as an ongoing process. This process can be observed here and now, in the Central and Eastern European expressions of the current double crisis of global capitalism and European integration.

Activity: Conference

May Day School, a week-long international conference on the problem of primitive accumulation of capital in the (post-)transition in the Eastern and Central Europe.

Thematic structure

Primitive accumulation as a concept: we will present the history and the development of the concept from Marx to its contemporary applications. Here, at least three topics can be addressed. First, can the concept of primitive accumulation be used only when examining the initial period in the history of capitalism, or can it be applied to subsequent periods as well? Second, can primitive accumulation serve as a countertendency to the tendential fall in the rate of profit? And finally, can the concept of primitive accumulation help us understand the new forms of subjectivisation and resistance that have multiplied in the last few decades?

Three historical blocs will follow, each covering one of the three periods of the (post-) transition in the countries of the former Eastern bloc.

Primitive accumulation as a factor in the transition period: the “shock doctrine” of Jeffrey Sachs and other Chicago Boys as carried out in the countries of the former Eastern bloc (the policy package of privatization, liberalization, deregulation, and macroeconomic “stabilization”).

Primitive accumulation as a factor in the EU accession process: primitive accumulation as an effect of the adjustments of the legal order and fiscal and monetary policies, as they were and (say, in the cases of Croatia and Serbia) are still required by the EU from the candidate states.

Primitive accumulation as a factor in the fiscal sustainability policy: the third and final historical bloc will receive the most attention. It will try to show that primitive accumulation is the goal of such policies and processes as the financial sustainability policy, with its demands for the privatization and commodification of what so far has been public and freely available (also by way of introducing “effective public management” and ‘public-private partnerships’), as well as various financial processes (such as draining public funds by way of high interest rates on state bonds) and state redistribution (by way of, say, changes in the tax system in favor of private companies and wealthy individuals)

Speakers: Rok Kogej, David McNally, Michael Perelman, Lev Centrih, Henry Bernstein, Sašo Furlan, Werner Bonefeld, Tomislav Medak, Erik Swyngedouw, Anej Korsika, Goran Musić, Joachim Becker, Andrew Kliman, Jan Toporowski, Marko Kržan, Mislav Žitko, Marko Kostanić, Stipe Ćurković, Toni Prug, Michael Lebowitz, Primož Krašovec, Marko Kostanić, Boris Kanzleiter, Luka Mesec, Walter Baier, Christina Keindl, Andrea Milat

Publication: collection of articles to be published by the end of 2013.

Organization: Institute for Philosophy and Social Theory – IFDT

Project title: “Introduction to the Critique of Political Economy in Contemporary Context”

Year: December, 2013

Place: Belgrade, Serbia

Context analysis: After the collapse of the socialist project, the region of Southeast Europe is being affected by rapid processes of neoliberal transformation. These processes have been affirmatively and uncritically articulated and perceived, which is something that the project should address and confront. Up to this point, neoliberal hegemony had all the necessary preconditions for its emergence and reproduction. On the one hand, it had material and institutional support, while, on the other, it was cast as a progressive and modernizing tendency. Perspectives critical of capitalism had been consigned to the past and perceived as a part of the unsuccessful socialist project.

The dominant, neoliberal perspective lacks a potential to explain present problems and processes that trouble contemporary Serbia, especially social ills and economic hardships that it has brought upon the society in the last two decades. The above mentioned problems are particularly felt in those social strata, including many university (under)graduates, affected by unemployment, precariousness, debts and poverty. Within these strata, the need for critical understanding and a production of alternatives is becoming more apparent. Since critical political economy is a theoretical approach that focuses upon the influence of the global context on specific social and economic dynamics in a particular region, we hope that it will provide an instrument to a wider audience to overcome an understanding based on isolated perspectives.

The main actors that we have in mind include theoretically informed members of the mentioned strata, who have the conceptual tools and capacities, as well as left-wing activists who have a need for such an approach in order to enable and upgrade their political practice. However, the existing academic and political structures might put up some resistance to the realization of the wider process of self-education, which is the long-term goal of our project. This anticipation comes from experiences of many activists and actors involved in similar activities over the years.

Activity: 3-day conference

The main planned activity within the project is a three-day conference named The Relevance of the Critique of Political Economy in Contemporary Context. Preparatory activities include an ongoing study group focused on related topics, as well as encouraging the speakers to do the necessary research beforehand, in order to give well-informed speeches. The conference will take place in the first week of December and will host about 40 participants. The goal of the event is to provide basic understanding of political economy to a wider audience, but primarily to left-wing activists and theorists.

Topics:

One day of the conference will be devoted to contemporary crisis of capitalism and austerity measures and to the inclusion of post-socialist Balkan countries in the global division of labor. Through the application of knowledge gained in the previous two days, we aim to achieve a more concrete and regionally specific analysis of contemporary capitalist processes. The participants of the first round table are as follows: Marko Kostanic, Anej Korsika and Toni Bandov. The participants of the second round table are: Primoz Krasovec, Toni Prug and Goran Music.

Speakers: Marko Kostanic, Anej Korsika, Toni Bandov, Primoz Krasovec, Toni Prug and Goran Music.

Publication: collection of articles to be published in Serbian language by mid 2014.