

Reflections on the first workshop day (October 24th) by Frieder Otto Wolf

We have tried to address the problems posed by conceiving a modern left wing policy in Europe and in the EU, specifically reflecting its dynamic global context, and trying to reflect recent experiences adequately, while establishing a theoretical basis for a critical approach to them.

The task formulated by *Judith Dellheim* in the “Opening” had been to clarify the global context and the theoretical basis of the discussion. She had asked the workshop participants about the advantages and limits of the core periphery model, stressing the strengthened global role of the US, without speaking directly about the global role of the EU. She emphasized the need for political strategies addressing the causes and causes of the crisis, dealing with specific, concrete living conditions of people, analyzing them as opportunities for political interventions and organizing solidarity: Therefore, the tasks of clarifying the global dynamics of the complex crisis constellation and, specifically, in order to develop the capability for such an analysis, of articulating an adequate theoretical basis for such an analysis of structures and contradictions would constitute the underlying common background of our debate.

Aleksandar Stojanović has highlighted the central role of the representation of a functional capitalist society, which different regions have referred to in different ways in the dissolution process of Yugoslavia. Decisive sequences of the respective transition processes had already been going on for decades. The interesting question to be asked and answered is, why this did go on for decades in spite of continuously catastrophic results? The main reason for that is to be found in the class basis of the dominant groups. However, the further question has to be analyzed whether it is really useful a) to analyze this in terms of a national vs. comprador bourgeoisie (see the dependency theory as formulated for former Latin America)? And b) the complementary question should not be neglected: Is it really adequate to speak about an acceptance or an active submission of/among the subservient-dominated classes, without analyzing the mechanisms by which this is achieved (which e.g. make nationalism attractive for broader popular masses)? Is it completely true that this perspective it becomes clearly visible that there have been strategic similarities, and only tactical differences of the transitory processes/discourses within Yugoslavia: e.g. between Serbia, Croatia, and Slovenia ...

The really decisive question has to be posed and analyzed historically: Why has (have) there been no credible, politically relevant alternative (alternatives) to the clearly dominant capitalist forms of trans-national integration (finance, free trade, production hierarchies)?

The main challenge for the left resulting from these developments today clearly are: How to be internationalist without – by so doing – giving its support to the on-going process of (European) capitalist trans-national integration, and is there a space for a of left nationalism?

In the ensuing debate, the following three questions have been raised: Whether it is a possible and realistic perspective for dominant groups in Eastern Europe to strive for a convergent transition towards the model of “competitive state” now dominant within the EU? What is the role of European/EU narrative in the politics of candidate

and accession states? Which models of accumulation and which regimes of regulation are open to them (and which different class interests result from these on the side of respective bourgeois groups)?

Kees van der Pijl asked the question of the present [articulated] “system”, to be analyzed comprehensively. In this perspective, he highlighted three historical interventions by Samuel P. Huntington, which have occurred at decisive points of the recent historical development:

- a) taking economics out of the democratic politics (as an experts’ affairs)
- b) creating a hidden reserve structure of political domination outside of the reach of democratic politics (Cheyney /Rumsfield – uncovered by Snowden)
- c) mobilizing ethno-politics (exemplified in the breaking up Yugoslavia), anticipated in confrontations with China, Islam (and now Russia).

But the “system” continues to be in crisis – and this crisis has grown more acute. This is reflected in the following constellation:

- finance is bracketed off (by internationalisation, globalisation) from politics;
- an authoritarian state (Frank Deppe) is introduced;
- the ethnic definition/construction of conflicts becomes the norm of everyday politics.

And yet, in the present situation, we are facing a growing fragility of the power of the West, while a new imperial/hegemonic rivalry between Germany [and the EU] and the US has begun to make itself felt [Rapallo-syndrome among US elites].

As a counter-strategy the US resort to stressing the common enemy: the definition of a common enemy (Carl Schmitt) should now integrate the West (NATO reforms, TTIP). In this perspective a number of strategic developments can be explained:

- the war against the terror (again as an expert affair, unfettered by democratic controls),
- the war economy (cf. Naomi Klein),
- the emergence of the surveillance state (Snowden).

According to *Kees van der Pijl* there is an emerging Atlantic ruling class – and it has started to exercise its sovereignty by declaring “a state of emergency” (Carl Schmitt), thereby justifying its aggressive forward push – this then leads to the process by which neoliberalism now is producing neo-fascism.

This last complex of theses was taken up critically by the questions asked in the ensuing debate: Should we not renew the question of the role of endogenous forces (instead of just looking at global imperial dynamics, and should we not rather differentiate between fascism and authoritarianism in analyzing the political outcomes of neo-liberalism? It does no more seem to be true that authoritarianism differs from fascism by not resorting to mass mobilization – in the 90s new forms of mass politics seem to have emerged which make it possible for formally democratic and merely authoritarian regimes to resort to an effective mass mobilization historically characteristic for fascist regimes. Lastly, the question was asked, how we can understand these political transformations within states in terms of the geo-political transformations of the 1990.

Sergios Tzotzes spoke about the Greek case as a “normal” neoliberal one: of course, the consequences of the current austerity policy are extremely hard, but it is not an exception from the common neoliberal policy model. The aim was/is to create a new “disciplined labour periphery” within the EU (unprotected, low-paid, well skilled). In this process supra-national agencies and global financial markets play an important

role: They make strategic use of the national governments (and of national bourgeoisies). Within Greece, and within the comparable member states of the EU, these function as “local care-takers” which are essential for the implementation of strategies, especially in the reconfiguration processes of the labour markets and the resulting dramatic disempowerment of the working class.

The Greek case is not exceptional, but exemplary – there are also other indebted countries of the European periphery which are submitted to the same kind of strategies, and as a consequence of these strategies being applied, European divergences are growing, instead of a rising convergence within the EU.

Özge Yaka has dealt with the centre periphery model's capacity to explain developments of contemporary capitalism. In the core regions de-industrialization and internal regional exploitation are being intensified, while geographies are shifting. For explaining that, the core-periphery-model is not very helpful: It does not explain the internal differentiation/fragmentation within the regions, nor the financialisation as an agent of further extending capitalist relations. There are relevant processes below and beyond the nation state logic, which have to be included in the analysis, as they have been highlighted by the anti- and alter-globalisation movements.

More emphasis is needed on analyzing specific power relations and basic societal relations of domination within the respective states. The crisis of the last decades has resulted in instabilities, and riots (also) in the core. Even explicit pauperism in the core is rising, and not really different from the same phenomenon in the periphery. Such developments, in fact, do increase the need for an active solidarity between people in the core and in the periphery. In terms of research needed this means that we have to see the hierarchies beyond the nation state structures as an object of analysis and at the same time as a real or potential subject of power.

Johannes Jäger defended the core-periphery-model as a decisive one in order to understand ongoing political and social developments, postulating a political economy perspective, with a dialectical approach. He reaffirmed that the model – as used in a more subtle way within the regulation approach – could explain dependency and development, by grasping the economic perspective in a systematic way: looking at the questions of which policy will make development possible and which political forces will promote it – specifically looking at possibilities for introducing more inclusive models of accumulation, as well as regimes of accumulation. The integration of the Euro zone may be analyzed as an exemplary example of such a development.

What can we learn from these contributions? What can we adequately reflect at this point of our debate?

Taken together, the contributions have underlined the need for specific, differentiated, and yet theoretically constructed in-depth studies of the varying dynamics of structural processes and struggles for alternatives.

Concerning the core-periphery model, I think we have learned three important points:

- that the core periphery model tends to make us think in monopolar terms, while the present global situation is clearly multipolar (questions of imperial rivalries in the West, of emerging new – and competing – imperial powers (like China among the BRIC states), as well as of descending, former imperial powers (like the UK and France within the EU);

- that the core-periphery model tends to make us underestimate complexity, especially by neglecting the issue of the mass support to be gained and reproduced within the “integrated” societies of the core countries;
- that the core-periphery model tends to make us overlook internal contradictions within the core, especially the destructive effects of the hegemony of finance upon the industrial base of leading capitalist countries (role of the City of London within a de-industrializing UK).

Concerning our attempt to more clearly identify the causes and the causes of these processes of a renewal of capitalist domination (even in its crisis) we should, first, not forget about its mediocre overall results (expressing itself in a low average rate of profit in comparison to post-war “Fordism”), nor abstract from the pressure of the “limits to growth” (as making itself felt in the series of on-going ecological crises, leading to struggles over control of raw materials and of energy resources – oil and gas –, as well as of resources for food production). Second, we should not forget to analyze how the ruling class is itself structured and organized – on an Atlantic, on a EU, and/or on a German scale.

On the bases of such a broader understanding of the present situation it will be very significant to carry out specific studies, in order to analyze and to explain the ruptures and rivalries between

- EU/Europe
- EU/Germany
- EU/USA;

while clearly defining as well the underlying intra-societal structures of conflict, e.g. in the capital-labour relation or e.g. in competition between enterprise groups and regions, as the international potential of mobilizing against common enemies

Such a differentiated analysis should make us capable to construct at least rudiments for a counter-strategy, operating on different levels (EU, national, regional and local) and addressing specific struggles: esp. regional and enterprise competition, on the one hand, and struggles for “national independence”, as well as struggles of solidarity of all those who are oppressed, marginalised and exploited, on the other. In this way we should begin to conceive a multidimensional, and yet converging, if not unitary struggle (e.g. of workers, women, and migrants a significant social categories, as well as of marginalized countries of the South and of the East of the EU). In this way, by starting from the struggles, as they exist, we could begin to build specific solidarities, on the level of the EU or of Europe, as well as on a global level, taking up the struggle against the present neo-liberal policies of the EU as a common concern.

Such a differentiated strategic model would be important for a left government e.g. Syriza in Greece: On its basis Syriza could pursue the following lines of action:

- acting as a veto power within the EU,
- making specific blackmailing impositions by Troika or EU visible to the public,
- accentuating existing and emerging splits in the hegemonic bloc,
- making clear that being in government is not being in power,
- empowering left grass-roots projects of solidarity and mobilization,
- building a common public capacity for resistance and intervention in an on-going political process, by constructing broader alliances concerning specific issues.

Deepening and concretizing our analysis beyond the confines of the simplifying model of “core” and “periphery” seems to be a first requirement for producing the kind

of knowledge needed for conceiving and concretizing such a strategy – on all levels (especially on the member state, as well as on the EU level) and in all dimensions (class struggle, identity politics, gender politics, ...).

Beyond our analytical work we could participate in constructing common left projects of solidarity and mobilization, while building upon really emerging capacities and capabilities for resistance against the implementation of neo-liberal policies and for specific interventions into on-going political processes on the level of EU and member states' institutions.