



5. Letter, February 2022

Privatisation and social austerity, or socialisation and emancipation of public services and infrastructures?

Dear friends of political philosophy,

the privatization of the public sphere, i.e., the subjugation of welfare-state institutionalities, public infrastructures and social services to the form and financial power of the neo-liberally radicalized, globally wired exploitation or capital economy, is now damaging all social life. The necessary criticism and counter-movements are still asserting themselves rather randomly and at respective focal points:

For example, there are initiatives for the expropriation of housing corporations, for remunicipalization, for a new urban practice or even approaches for non-profit companies. It is said that health is not a commodity and the situation of care workers or the conditions in private homes are deplored. Transport systems that serve the general public or even media and the internet should be better run as public services. Last but not least, there is growing criticism of a capital-based pension.

I would now like to get to the bottom of this in more detail and draw political consequences. To do this, it is first and foremost necessary to correct inadequate historical periodizations. To this end, I take up previous letters that revealed the tripartite structure and contradictory processuality of modern "social capitalism": The privatization or denationalization in question concerns a cornerstone or process node of this socioeconomic formation.

The configuration of the latter shows that public or "social-economic services" do not produce marketable goods, but rather generally useful infrastructural, civilizational foundations of a given society. Thus, they constitute an essentially non-capitalist "economic form" and, in their sum, a complementary main department of economic reproduction. The industrial-capitalist productions can themselves exist only in connection with or on this enormous basis.

In this respect, the idea of "the economy" as a more or, in many cases, less social market and capital economy is deceptive. In this prevailing perspective, the social economy counts above all as consumption or as an annoying overhead cost of the capital economy. Hence the financially always scarce, austeritarian welfare state, the tendency toward chronic neglect of social infrastructures. Related activities are neglected, paid less and valued less than work in the industrial and export economy, or else appropriated or privatized.

However, in a social perspective the social economy that is highly equipped in terms of investment also generates economic value. The collective bargaining and political struggle should therefore also be directed at achieving full parity of pay in relation to the average wage in society, whether it is a matter of public administration and enterprises with a public character or of educational, social, nursing and cultural work.

But even more: It is not only about "social security", basic services and basic equipment, but about the core substance and further development of the existential and civilizational level, which is not measured by "income". Thus, the social economy is even more important for an embedded existence of people and as a general basis for economy and welfare than the in many respects superfluous and harmful commodity and growth economy and the consumerism linked with it.

Overall, everyone can feel that the general and inherently common, non-profit institutionalities and tasks - the versatility and scope of which are usually not obvious and are hardly measured - belong under public sovereignty and democratic responsibility. They should be operated with overall social foresight and planning, with all the necessary financing on the part of a consistently taxing legal, social and national state. This also requires suitable forms of ownership and economic organization.

However, a form of public service organization, in the field of competition, is not sufficient for exemption from exploitation and misappropriation. Moreover, the specified "social-economic services" must be financed predominantly from tax revenues and made generally available: Public offers and services as the quasi other half of the wage, of social benefits or also of the pension.

As an "economic form," the social economy, like "commodity" or "capital," cannot be grasped empirically on its own. Accordingly, industrial productions and services can also be instituted without exploitation and growth constraints, i.e. differently from a "green capitalism". This is not only for "critical" or "strategic" infrastructures, but mainly for the sake of overall social development and emancipation and to cope with problems concerning climate, pandemics, environment and catastrophes: A vaccine production serving capital exploitation is itself a disease.

Thus, the way to a reproductive compound and a mixed economic system with a thereby requested, more developed democratic practice is emerging. Thereby the services do not serve the world market, but provide the equipment for the concrete, socio-spatially determined community. Thus, they are part of internal, also regional and local cycles and important on the communal level. The relative strengthening of this fundamental political-economic self-reference improves the basic position for the deglobalization that will be necessary in the future.

This perspective requires an emphatic social and political struggle against privatization and neoliberal alienation. It is not just a matter of alleviating various grievances. The inner unity of these struggles is rather that it is about the emancipation of social-economic services as an alternative economic form and fundamental socio-economic practice, and thus, about a fundamental change of social and systemic conditions.

Best regards,
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