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## **Theses on Wolfgang Streeck's plea for the national state, a democratic-Keynesian social formation and multipolar world reordering**

Wolfgang Streeck's 'Between Globalism and Democracy' is one of the most topical and important contributions on this subject area. The publication has found a diverse echo in quite a few reviews. After all, the reflections constitute a challenge to be taken seriously for a real re-foundation of politics.

They also contain challenges for Marxist approaches, left formations and for political philosophy in general. This is the subject of the present contribution. In this draft, I will present the basic ideas of Wolfgang Streeck's work in as brief a form as possible, followed by my own thoughts, be they close, different or more far-reaching. This version of the theses is intended to encourage discussion and exchange and is open to improvements and clarifications.

### **1. A fundamental and positive assessment of the nation state**

*Streeck's thoughts are based not least on the awareness of the self-will and the diversity of human socialization and state architectures. The basic idea is the conceptualisation of modern social and national statehood as the basis for a democratically qualified, sovereign social existence. In this sense, it represents a constitutive, sustainable social formation at the height of the times. The subsequent reflections are understood as a challenge to a genuine re-foundation of politics.*

This fundamental and positive conception or better modelling of the role of modern legal, social and nation-statehood can be justified socio-ontologically, empirically and historically. Democracy, for example, in its proper sense, presupposes per se a sovereign social existence. The role of the national in history would thus have to be understood in its practical-dialectical contradictoriness. This concept contradicts widespread or leftist views on the role of statehood and the national. It is equally opposed to right-wing, nationalist as well as pseudo-progressive, cosmopolitan conceptualisations.

### **2. The stagnating contradiction between globalism and democracy**

*Streeck focuses on the contradiction that is acute in the social reproduction context of democratic capitalism between a more or less democratised constitution of the social state and a neoliberalism and globalism that are relatively detached or negatory in relation to it and are shaped both politico-economically and ideologically. This situation, which is practically undecided in the back and forth, marks a secular social stagnation crisis.*

The relationship between democracy and capitalism, if one takes the former at its word or seriously, always corresponds to a foul compromise. Moreover, such a tense, problem-laden social formation is increasingly proving not to be really capable of development and a viable future. However, representative-democratic practicality cannot serve as an actual instance of deliverance for a reform of the whole. It is first and foremost an institutional formant of the

underlying liberal-capitalist formation, even if one tries to defend it again and again: That relationship therefore does *not* mark the actual decisive contradiction, but leaves enough room for compromise.

### **3. The formula for the desired transformation is not yet a concrete alternative**

*The emancipation of this political social formation in relation to the still predominant, neoliberal radicalised capital economy and to corresponding supranational or globally operating institutions offers itself as an elementary development step, with which things can be ordered politico-economically differently. In this perspective, the most diverse ideas of reform, alternative and transformation are articulated today, as in every and always special historical turning point.*

The formula for the intended change is subsumption of the dis-embedded economy under democratic political control instead of the other way round or instead of a systemic and social crisis that is postponed repeatedly. To begin with, however, social forces and counter-forces, the system of contradictions of existing social practice, a bursting ensemble of productive forces or even the real systemic and social-historical tendency of capital and financial-economic development have not yet been determined more concretely. This also raises the question of why, despite enormous efforts, alternative ideas and experiments, the identification of the core structure of the sought-after alternative has not yet succeeded.

### **4. The failed, regressive construction of the European Union**

*In the sense of the outlined perspective, the supranational construction of the European Union proves to be a regressive, socio-technocratic, centralist entity: It undermines the democratic, sovereign constitution of the states concerned, makes the liberalist-capitalist constitution of the societies involved practically irreversible, reinforces the offensive character of NATO and sides with US imperialism. The fundamental alternative would be a regional-cooperative, perhaps confederal institutionalisation in peaceful neighbourhood.*

The construct, experiment or even the ideal glare of the European Union plays a special role. In the perspective that has been developed, it is, as mentioned, a construction that is predominantly and, in its essence, flawed and not least an institutionalised precaution against any seriously alternative or socialist perspective for Europe. For the time being, it may be that the internal contradictions and dysfunctions of the EU will intensify, also with regard to the financial sphere, and thus point over and over again to the alternative of a politico-economically differently based, confederally cooperating social and national statehood and peaceful coexistence.

### **5. The progressive construction of a Keynes-Polanyi statehood**

*The hope is for the configuration of a neo-Keynesian economics and modern economic policy and the achievement of the primacy of the political social and nation-state, and thus a corresponding containment of neoliberal and finance capitalist practices and instances. This democratic Keynes-Polanyi statehood should allow for a more controlled economic development, in particular an expansion of public economic, socio-economic forms as well as economic-social assertion and coexistence in international and global contexts.*

The design of the Keynes-Polanyi state has progressive characteristics. But Keynesianism, or even a rediscovered Keynes, has no conception of economic value to really explicate a systemic alternative. It was Polanyi who first opened up perspectives for a more far-off peaceful era or even democratic socialism. Here the thesis leads on to the idea that a system alternative can come within reach through the further development of Marx's research approach from an analysis based on value and reproduction to an analysis based on

transformation theory and practice science. Moreover, this must start at the level of today's formational, i.e., social capitalist, development. This approach points to fundamental omissions of Marxist political economy.

## **6. Karl Marx, Marxism and the Failure or Crisis of the Left**

*Streeck incorporates Marx's political economy or analyses regarding the reality, crisis and finiteness of capitalism and identifies democratic capitalism as today's type: After the failure of the socialist planned economy without replacement, he looks for an approach here. In the process, a failure of Marxism and the left is stated, for example regarding theories of the state, the connotation of the nation state with authoritarianism and aggressiveness, the understanding of democracy as a canon of values rather than institutional, and the infiltration of universalist ideas or cosmopolitan illusions.*

The *political-economic* approach rightly points to the insufficiency of *socio-ecologically* driven initiatives. However, the focus on Keynes and Polanyi lacks essential philosophical-scientific and other references to Marx. Thus, democratic capitalism, a.k.a. the social-capitalist formed social and nation state, is not subjected to any actual political-economic analysis regarding latent existing contents of an alternative formation. The criticism of common Marxism and left currents, on the other hand, weighs heavily - especially that the national, which is in itself constitutive, is left to the conservative right: such failures and mistakes, some of which go back a long way, cause persistent problems of orientation and even existence.

## **7. A social-state-economic configuration and multipolar world reordering**

*All in all, the basic features of a differently configured legal, social and national statehood in its political-economic core shape are emerging. This is based on a reorganisation of the relationship between, on the one hand, market and capital-economic and, on the other hand, public and socio-economic forms and sectors, with a significant expansion of collective goods and internal growth. The taxing state, the whole procedurally integrative, also protective, corrective and planning, participatory, democratically organised welfare state system plays a central role in this.*

Finally, it becomes clear to what extent a systemically and institutionally different nation state could assert and develop itself in terms of a *social state economy*. In this formation, which was also strengthened by an economically self-referential dimension, it also formed a constitutive basic element in the coexistence of different world societies or even confederally organised state systems. The chronic capital, fiscal and socio-economic problems and crises are pushing for this more stable and economically cosmopolitan solution. Growing tendencies of de-globalisation are also contributing to this. This opens up the prospect of a multipolar world reordering, in contrast to the liberalist-capitalist, hegemonically or imperially stressed and confrontational world on the brink of self-destruction.

## **8. Overcoming the crises and challenges of humanity**

*In order to overcome the multiple crises and human challenges, first and foremost the climate and environmental crisis, the alternative national social constitution appears to be the most suitable: After all, the production of collective goods or the mobilisation of collective energies is best achieved in a context of democratic, sovereign, national societies that are not too large. The civilised states can coordinate and learn from each other in many ways.*

In addition, there is the prospect that collective interests can best be mobilised if this is based on a shared rethinking and corresponds to one's own emancipated personality. This, however, requires downright cultural revolutionary movements, such as those just beginning

to emerge in the growth critique and climate movements: With green capitalism, one gets over the hump, as in A. Paul Weber's famous caricature. And how can the ideationally and medially overwhelming productions of affirmative contents of consciousness, the social controls in the course of the advancing digital upheavals, the tendencies towards the decomposition of reason in the social intellect be countered? Finally, the question arises as to how the ensemble of social forces necessary for the hoped-for social emancipation, which is also present subjectively and ideally, can be grasped.

## 9. An antagonistic socio-historical transitional situation

*The overall historical situation presents itself as a sort of stalemate or struggle in a socio-historical intermediate phase and under concrete geopolitical circumstances, as the view of the field of tension between the USA, China and Europe also shows. In the face of such challenges, the left is largely failing, while right-wing forces and also the tendency towards authoritarian liberalism are gaining strength. Nevertheless, there will be windows of opportunity for the envisaged transformation in Europe and in other parts of the world, with an ultimately open outcome.*

Streeck's definition of the situation does not achieve the sharpness of the definition of the socio-historical situation as a transitional period, for which the world systems theorist states a life and death struggle between the decaying and an emerging, civilisational higher economic and social formation. The moderate view could distract from the basically antagonistic character of this struggle, which touches all pores and angles of social life, and the necessary political consequence.

It is clear from all this that the sought-after political-economic alternative, as Marx paraphrased it, is already crystallised or latently present in the bosom of the social-capitalist formation. Thus, the main contradiction that is decisive today is between the existing, still overpowering, regressive and decadent formation and a future formation of reproduction and practice - which has not yet been really established and is also not directly graspable for a concrete democratic practice - to which a broader ensemble of social forces is assigned: The problems thus have an eminently theoretical and political dimension.

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