

„Some Remarks to the Future- Power and Political Economy Aspects“

(Lecture at Eurispes conference ,‘Laboratorio di analisi e Riflessione sulle Prospettive Del Paese’, 8, 9 and 10 September 2017)

Rolf Dieter Hepp

Social Transformations. Research on Precarisation and Diversity – An international and interdisciplinary Journal/ Soziale Transformationen. Forschungen zu Prekarisierung und Diversität – ein internationales, interdisziplinäres Journal

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Local experience and globality can be deciphered as levels of experience in social life. Arnold Gehlen has already pointed out that experiences taken outside of the local context in terms of space and time determine the local context. This also means that Europe cannot design the future on its own initiative and independently, but is shaped by developments in the transatlantic and Asia-Pacific region. This applies equally to the economic, welfare state, as well as social relations and the social context, since neo-liberalism develops massive pressure to dismantle the social state through ideologically oriented interpretations of globalization.

A socio-politically relevant programme requires a multitheoretical or transdisciplinary approach so that different levels can be put into relation and terms can be compared with each other under different aspects. Law, philosophical, cultural, social, digital, linguistic, epistemological, as well as ethnological dimensions and geographical spaces and realities are increasingly interlinked, so that a transdisciplinary reflection of different levels and dimensions is necessary in order to be able to work out the differing questions and modes of development in an almost correct way.

The game with large numbers and statistics points to the fact that problems can be quantified and represented in corresponding relations. This means that developments lose their horror. If the sea level rises by 2 meters due to global warming, this seems to be a problem that can be solved. But what does it mean for countries like Netherland, Denmark and Bangladesh, which are only just above sea level?

Paugam points out that if you set the poverty threshold at 50% of the median income, you are limited to 6% of the population. With 60% only 120,00€ more (4,00€ per day more) one comes however already on 12,4%., doubles thus the number of the poverty-prone ones. This should also apply to Germany. Since the Hartz reforms, poverty among workers and the unemployed has become more widespread in Germany than in all other EU countries.

Serge Paugam emphasises in his study about poverty that poverty includes an arbitrary social definition. Castel shows how an early act for social cuts in France defines the minimal revenue (‘revenue minimale’), thus specifying poverty and identifying the poor statistically and numerically. This is important because societies tend to hide this fact in a kind of complicity of benefit donors and benefit recipients, as a lot of people eligible to unemployment benefit II don’t make use of their rights in this respect. Similar facts apply to Germany. Since the existence of unemployment benefit II, financial poverty can be determined by 409 Euro for a single individual (this rate comes down in the case of couples, families etc.) plus the fixed rent rate. In contrast to the statements by German politicians in the Eighties that poverty doesn’t exist in Germany, unemployment benefit II provides a concrete definition of economic poverty without including those persons living even below this unemployment benefit II level. In this context Paugam refers to the fact that this definition of poverty fixes a very permeable borderline of how to determine poverty. He was often asked during his lectures whether he has got statistical verifications of his hypothesis.

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“In France in the year 2001 6% of the population lived at the poverty level of 50% of the median income per consumption unit (approximately 600 Euros per month), i.e. 3,6 million people lived in poverty; the poverty level of 60% of the median income per consumption unit (approximately 720 Euros per month) could be applied to more than 12,4% of the population, i.e. to more than double, in total to 7,2 million people. Hence a little variation of the official poverty threshold is sufficient to change the percentage of people affected radically. This result reveals a significant concentration of households close to this threshold and shows that this threshold creates a radical cut through an entirety of persons who in reality live under similar circumstances.” Paugam, *Die elementaren Formen der Armut*, 2008, p. 13.

In terms of the case of housing the so-called “inappropriateness or inadequacy of accommodation” (cit. from rules and regulations of unemployment benefit II) could not be only considered as an administrative problem or administrative principle but this becomes an existential threat also for those employees and workers who regarding their financial situation don’t stand out much from unemployment benefit II recipients. In contrast to them unemployment benefit II recipients have access to low-priced monthly tickets for public transport, and they are exempted from paying TV licence fees with the effect that financial and social differences (between unemployment benefit II recipients and low wage earning employees/workers) become less. Increases of rent even merely on the basis of higher expenses for operational costs or energy jeopardise the housing and living situation of particularly those parts of the population who are financially anyway in a bad situation.

Since 2004, the number of employees in Germany has grown strongly and unemployment has fallen significantly. The "employment miracle" also survived the worst economic crisis of the post-war period. But the positive development has a downside, as it became clear that the success of German employment was associated with a high social price. According to the EU statistics agency Eurostat, 7.1 percent of the working population in Germany were affected by poverty in 2009. In other words, they had access to less than 60 percent of the average net income based on their needs - that is the current scientific poverty line. In Germany, this threshold for a single person is 940 euros per month.

In our society the relationship between periphery and center is changing. Questions that are discussed under the conditions of outsiders and suspended social groups penetrate the center of society and systematically determine the social correlations. Inequality, poverty, social insecurity and precariousness are equated with changes in social change when the risk of social exclusion is undermined by unskilled activities. This is, for example, very much the case in the German discussion, so that outsider groups are defined here, which have themselves maneuvered into a corresponding social situation through wrong biographical decisions.

Here, the French approach of Bourdieu, Castel and Boltanski/ Chiapello differs decisively, as they place social insecurities and precariousness in a reorganization of the work structure. It is important to see how restructuring in the social space is assembling it in a different way and developing new social premises. In the process, precarization shifts to the centre of society and qualified work develops into insecure and precarious working relationships within the framework of reorganization into project activities.

Precarization produces a restructuring of the social social context, which transverses to the classical division between the periphery and the center and involves re-sorting of social space.

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Social insecurity and vulnerability are scattered across social space and meet both skilled and unskilled workers; - this places fear, apprehensions and uncertainties in society.

The German Chancellor favors the model of an economic-oriented democracy. As a result, social and democratic achievements are broken through the functionality of a capital-oriented interest. Social aspects and democratic development modes become secondary because they are unilaterally subsumed under capital interests. The financial policy aspects of the European model are in the "last instance" (Althusser) top priority. In the sense of a shortened Marxist-oriented perception, these shortenings have to be counteracted by the fact that economics takes place under social conditions and action-oriented forms of communication whose character of force (hire and fire) is counterproductive.

The social state is restricted and potentially reduced via financial policy interventions. In this way, crises are anchored in society. On the one hand society becomes ever richer, on the other hand more and more parts of society are threatened by poverty. Social insecurity is becoming a threat scenario for large populations.

Socially, in spite of all the problems, a picture of a prosperity society is being built that negates the problems and conflicts that the disputes within society do not perceive. Trump's victory in the 2016 presidential election, the 2016 Austrian presidential election, as well as the Brexit, are points of reference in which a break-up of discursively mediated realities breaks. Since in Austria with a thinnest majority in the election the candidate of the Greens against the right candidate was able to put through, here again put forward assaults. In the German election campaign in 2017, the image of a prosperity society was also reclaimed, with no significant social tensions.

Social problems are ignored by being blown out of public perception by defining specific discourses of public discourse. These views, however, are designed to create a picture of reality characterized by the fact that they are ignored by forms of transpositions as Bourdieu and Wacquant point out.

Apart from the automatic effect that the international circulation of ideas through their own logic tends to obscure original conditions and meanings, the play with pre-defined definitions and pointed conclusions replaces the contingency of the denied sociological necessities by the appearance of logical necessity the goal of concealing the historical roots of a whole series of questions and concepts. The "efficiency" of the (free) market, the necessity of recognizing (cultural) "identities" or the solemn reaffirmation of "(individual)" responsibilities are valid, depending on the place and time of their reception .In this way the communions are spread over the entire planet and - in the strictly geographical sense of the term - are globalized, but at the same time removed from all particularities. In this way, they are able to transform themselves into a universal common sense through unceasing confirmation in the media and to forget that they often only express the complex and thoroughly controversial historical condition of a certain society, which is taciturn to the model and the measure of all things: the American society of the post-Fordist and post-Keynesian era. (Compare Bourdieu, Wacquant, conceptual society, in http://www.monde-diplomatique.de/pm/2000/0_51121a0041_text.name_ask5K_Wlop.n, 23 January 23, 2014)

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One of the democratic processes within a society is that not different groups are played off against each other, but that they can gain mutual understanding by empathetic comprehension of the social situation. Based on the results of the 2010 elections in England, Standing points out that the poor performance of the Social Democrats is due to these contradictions, as they did not counteract the conflicts between immigrants and locals, which were intensified by the social reduction, but rather intensified these conflicts.

„Another reason for the breakdown of queuing was the dismantling of the labourist social security system. As governments rushed to replace social insurance by social assistance, long-term citizens found themselves disadvantaged in accessing benefits and social services. This has probably done more than anything to fan resentment of migrants and ethnic minorities, particularly in decaying urban areas that had been strongholds of the working class. While some of its own members blamed the Labour Party’s loss in the United Kingdom’s 2010 General Election to its failure to reach out to the white working class over immigration, they failed to see, or did not wish to acknowledge, that the means-testing system they themselves had built was the main problem.“ (Standing 2011, p. 104)

Additionally it has been observed that precarity and social insecurity do not refer any longer only to certain groups of the society such as unemployed people or to those ones who are ‘traditionally’ more in need of social benefit etc. but it accompanies and affects greater parts of the society, particularly those sections of the middleclass who conceive their social identity merely via their work ethics. The enhancement of the qualification profile of the professionals, the rising of competence of the employees and the fact that the actors relate their independence and existence to employment, such kind of job-orientation shows that on the one hand there is a ‘firm intention to work’ which on the other hand is being boycotted potentially by the restrictions on the labour market. If those structural elements are not deciphered and considered adequately there will be the danger that these social restructurings will be understood in such a way that integration measures and programmes will mainly focus only on the insufficiencies and problems of the individual actor regarding his/her ability to adjust to these new circumstances.

All this shows that insecurity and precarity have found their way even into the centre of the society because the re-organisation within the labour market doesn’t only affect unqualified employees but penetrates into the qualified segments of the labour market as well, thus devaluating know-how and expert knowledge, as a result even qualified employees are affected by this downturn as well. Those parts of the population who thought to be hardly affected socially and economically by those changes on the labour market find themselves all of a sudden facing precarious living conditions.

Consequentially new forms of social exclusion are being producing taxing the traditional social cohesion in European societies due to the demand of new forms of flexibility and mobility from the working people. That means that these changes don’t affect only those people who are supposed to be the classical precarious groups but also those persons with higher education who are supposed to play key roles in the society. While in former times poverty was synonymous with unemployment and diametrically opposite to gainful employment, this combination nowadays seems to be related rather to an outdated interpretation of the responsibilities of a welfare state. It seems that precarious living

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conditions as well as the fragility of the social system will grow all in all. That means that the integrative power of the social system is obviously being exposed to a vectorial modification without disappearing entirely, still being capable to assert its claim in reference to social and national structures. But this does not prevent the problems of precarity and insecurity earlier located at the marginal areas to shift into the centre of the societies now thus creating bases for possible societal conflicts.

Welfare state and the social state belong to different discourses, even if they are often used as synonyms in the discourses. The welfare state, in the form of an "etymological" root, refers to the welfare committees during the French Revolution, which led to the Jacobins' reign of terror. A derogatory use oriented on this connotation points to (and served to point out) how the attempt to distribute undeserved demands on the "unworthy" led to riots, uproar and terror and ultimately led to "anarchy". That is why social benefits must be linked to the corresponding ethical achievements of the individual, i. e. they must be learned and earned (the worthy arms, promote and demand). In civil society, social benefits were and are linked to the ability to work, only those who were or are not able to work for various reasons (primarily due to illness or disability) and who were unable to provide for themselves were entitled to social benefits and social support. The pedagogical track as an education of the working class was a fundamental motive inherent in the welfare concept as a requirement potential. The poor man had to prove himself worthy of the blessing. Philanthropic forms therefore contained moralizing demands that expressed themselves in "arbitrary" forms, since the giver had to acknowledge the incompetence and insufficiency of the beneficiary. According to Simmel, the welfare recipient is not poor because he does not have any subsistence resources, but because he is forced into a position of dependency as a recipient of social benefits.

The welfare state is based on a different basis, that of an "insurance society" (Ewald). The insurance society distinguishes itself by the fact that the employee collects claims in the course of his life, which are paid out in the event of an insured event (unemployment, illness, disability, pension) and whose claims the insured person has "earned" during his life. Insurance promotes a new type of relationship between individuals, which is based on a contractual relationship in the sense of Durkheim's "solidarity". The social insurances individualize the claim, but at the same time they bring the actors out of a situation of petitioning and almsgiving. Therefore, the social security benefit does not offer benefits that can be distributed or ignored, but instead constitutes a legal situation that protects the actor. Robert Castel points out that the welfare state does not mean a "victory" for the proletariat, but rather is based on the defeats of the leftist movements. Workers must accept the lower place in society in order to integrate themselves into the social divisions of a class society.

This means that the welfare state no longer corresponds to the welfare concept, has very little to do with social redistribution, but rather develops its own explosive quality.

The dialectic between welfare thoughts (dependency, petitioner position) and independence,

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subjectiveness, is addressed via work and insurance as the rights of the insured person. In the differences between the legal entitlement to insurance benefits and social security benefits, these criteria of social structuring oscillate into dependencies that make the beneficiary dependent on goodwill and good conduct.