

The aim of my short „opening speech“ is to present our workshop background and some suggestions.

This “Our” refers, of course, to my colleagues from the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation, but above all to my friends Frieder Otto Wolf and Joachim Spangenberg, who work with us independently, and to my colleague Lutz Brangsch who is a senior researcher in the foundation.

The workshop has a double “story”.

On the one hand it is the sixth workshop in the series "Is it Possible to Have Another Economics for Another Economic Policy?", that we have started in 2006 with a discussion of John M. Keynes. The following workshop subjects were socio-ecological reconstruction, Green New Deal, modern state interventionism, and sustainable economics.

So you may see a rising clear focus on the question “Is it Possible to Have Economics for Socio-Ecological Reconstruction, for Economic Policy orientated on Socio-Ecological Transformation?”.

The workshop series helped Frieder, Joachim and me writing the booklet “Exiting the Crises: Socio-ecological Transformation”, published by the Rosa-Luxemburg-Foundation last spring.

Last year we had an exciting workshop on Peter Söderbaums book „'Understanding Sustainability Economics. Towards Pluralism in Economics' – Economics for Sustainable Development”.

The workshop preparation started with the questions:

Why we are still in the political defensive, despite the obvious weaknesses of neoliberal ideology, and despite all the deficits of neoclassical economics, why have we not been able so far to push back the influence of neoclassical economics in economic teaching, in research and in economic practice?

We have then asked a further question:

Why is it necessary to focus alternative economics on sustainable development, and why does this necessarily imply advocating pluralism in economics?

Where, however, is the dividing line between pro-sustainability pluralism in economic-doctrines, on the one hand, and damaging arbitrariness, on the other hand?

For this reason especially, but also for other reasons – we have to ask which orientations should be given to research and to the teaching of economics?

Moreover, we cannot avoid the question, if it is not necessary to question anew the very object of economic science, on the one hand, and of economic policy, on the other, and to configure them in a new way, in order to be able to support a societal policy for sustainability?

And is it not equally necessary to locate pro-sustainability economic science and economic policy in a new relation to other disciplines and tendencies such as diverse strands of feminism and of eco-socialism?

In the fruitful discussion of these questions we have been challenged to deal with the causes and causers of the current crisis and, therefore, with the debt issue and its reflection in economics.

And again, we have been confronted with the ignored debt issue in mainstream economics (or a one-sided discussion of it), on the one hand, and with the dogmas and methods of neoclassicism, of neoclassical economics, on the other hand.

Few weeks after our workshop in December 2011, we have had the first EU experts's discussion in the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation.

Of course, here the debt problematic has been highlighted significantly.

So we concluded and decided to use the EU expert's discussion and the sixth workshops in our series to discuss the debt issue as a crucial issue: It is being used by the ruling forces to impose and to implement a neo-liberal transformation, while their democratic counterforces are searching for socially just and solidarity based alternative solutions for solving the social, ecological and global problems and overcoming the causes and the forces responsible for them.

We decided to proceed in this way also under the impression of David Graebers great book "The First 5000 years".

Until spring 2012 it has seemed to be possible to prepare and realize the project together with David who was in London, but then it became more and more risky and so we had to resign from counting on Graeber's participation.

But of course we have used the book and want to highlight especially one idea of David Graeber here - and I quote: "This book is a history of debt, then, but it also uses that history as a way to ask fundamental questions about what human beings and human society are or could be like – what we actually do owe each other, what it even means to ask that question."

Few weeks ago, one week before the Firenze 10+10 event we had our second EU experts's discussion.

It has dealt with five questions:

- a. What is new in the EU after "embarking into the complex crisis" and what does this mean for the approach of modern left/modern socialist politics?
- b. What is the connection between debt and financialization and how does it work - in relation to center-periphery relations within the EU and the relations between the EU and the poor/developing countries?
- c. The "case of Greece" as a challenge for the European Left - what does it mean in terms of politics?
- d. Which are the criteria for defining left wing alternatives to the ruling politics and to the dominating types of development?
- e. Which conclusions to draw for further research to be carried out and for redefining left/socialist politics?

These five questions explained the workshop program and the discussion focus on

- The debt issue as a promoting factor of financialisation representing a systemic transformation of the capitalist mode of production and living (in the sense of a new stage of the dialectic of productive forces and relations of production ) as well as of the role and function of finance;
- The current financial and Euro crisis as a promoting factor of financialisation of natural resources, of public finance and of the public dimension as a whole;

- Strategies and alternatives proposed by the left wing (with particular concern given to the orientation to be given to the development of the productive forces).

The discussion resulted into the thesis of a new stage of neoliberal transformation of the EU and in the conclusion to continue analysing the complex of debt – austerity policy – financialization – capitalist oligarchies – production and consumption patterns – hegemony – socio-ecological reconstruction/transformation – and the specially dramatic dimension of the Greek case.

The discussion on alternatives was focused on two questions which were already in the focus of many sent papers: on the commons issue and the scientific work using history of economic thought and economic history and analysing experience of normal people, of politically engaged individuals and collectives.

The third EU experts's discussion will help to qualify the analysis and discuss especially the question on modern capitalist oligarchies in relation to financialisation and EU transformation.

So our now starting workshop will focus on

- The debt debate as a conflicting issue in dealing with mainstream economics and a challenge for work on alternatives which are inseparably linked with democracy and commons
- The potential role of economic history, history of economics, political economy, ecological and institutional economics, and morals for economic policy.

The focus explains the programme of our workshop under the title

“The Debt Issue as a Challenge for Dealing with Mainstream Economics, for Elaborating and Teaching Economics for Socially and Ecologically Sustainable Development, for social and ecological Justice”.

Finally I want to remember on the five asked questions:

- a. Neoclassical economics and the debt issue
- b. The issue of ecological debt
- c. The debt issue as a challenge for the political activation of the multitudes of people, for new political alliances and for further research

- d. Values and pluralism in economics, limits of pluralism
- e. Conclusions for further research and for academic teaching; conclusions for political education and modern left/modern socialist politics.

In the small paper we sent you, we formulated some short provoking theses and I would like to name some of them:

Neoclassical economics don't know debt as societal relation between the debtor and the creditor. Neoclassical economics also don't know the debt issue as a question of sustainable reproduction of an agent in the society and of the society.

The current questions are: Who is why in an economically and socially stronger or weaker position in relation to the other. Who is why able to dictate the other? What does it mean for the development of the society?

It means, we are interested in the societal power relations, hierarchies, interests of actors, production and consumption patterns, production and consumption modes and their influence on the production and reproduction of living conditions – social, societal, ecological – of individual human beings and of the society as a whole.

One question is, if the debate on ecological debt could promote the organization and mobilization of political forces for as just as solidarity socially and ecologically sustainable development – for changing the economic structures in the industrial countries, for adaption to global warming and fighting social and ecological destruction in poor countries.

The challenge is to use the debt issue for (further) politicizing thinking and behaviour of people, for their organizing. Organizing, building political platforms and unions demand pluralism and common search for the truth at the same time.

Pluralism in Economics should be regarded as the tolerance or acceptance of positions going out from concrete principles:

- The universality of human rights
- The solidarity at first with the socially and ecologically weakest
- The approach to the social and ecological living conditions of peoples as inseparably interrelated

- The absolute priority of the survive of human being
- The wished and promoted dispute among economists, scientists about reality.

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At the end of our workshop I would like to remember what we agreed:

1. To permanently watch the three information sources we use, in particular for our networking and for networking with other scientific, social and political initiatives, organizations, movements:

- Our blog <http://debt-issues.blog.rosalux.de>
- The debtwatch blog of Steve Keen <http://www.debtdeflation.com/blogs/> (see his presentation in our workshop at

<http://www.debtdeflation.com/blogs/2012/12/01/the-debt-issue-in-neoclassical-economics/>

- The cadtm website <http://cadtm.org/English>

2. To send input for the blog and its successors for the two workshops 2013

3. To check the Background Paper again

4. To hold a discussion of those interested in bond design and monitoring the EU bonds discussion

5. To analyse the influence of neoliberalism on our own thinking and the concepts of the left more generally

6. To continue the discussion on the following three interlinked issues

- (1) Analysing the complex of debt – austerity policy – financialization – capitalist oligarchies – production and consumption patterns – hegemony – socio-ecological reconstruction/transformation – and the specially dramatic dimension of the Greek case.

- (2) Work on commons – “Beyond Ostrom”

- (3) Defending scientific autonomy and work on the method and methodology of research and teaching in Economics.

(1) and (2) will be the subjects of the both workshops 2013 – the third EU experts' discussion and the seventh workshop of our series "Is it Possible to Have Another Economics for Another Economic Policy?". Of course, (3) must be integrated into (1) and (2), but we need some special work, space and discussion and so we have to think how to implement (3) in more thoroughly than before.