

## The Future of the Working Class in the 21st Century

Kategorie: Zukunftsdiskussion

Colleagues from the Korean Political Science Association (KPSA) asked me - for a conference on the Future of Marxism in Seoul (September 2002) - to present my ideas upon the Future of the Working Class in the 21 century. I would like to say at the very beginning, that this subject may - for different reasons - produce expectations which I certainly could not fulfil.

### 1.

First of all, at the beginning of the 21st century Marxism itself - as social science as well as a guide to political organisation and action (we heard this already in many contributions to this conference) - is rather marginalised (all over the world). A rather new book of British social scientists on "Marxism and Social Sciences" (1999), opens by the following sentence: "Marxism is widely perceived to be in crisis, and many believe the crisis is terminal" (Gamble et al. 1999: 1). And, within Marxist analysis, class analysis - including analyses of the transformation as well as of the culture and of the politics of the working-class - seems to be extremely marginalised.

Last year I contributed an essay to a book dedicated to the 65th anniversary of the German Marxist philosopher Wolfgang Fritz Haug. The title of the essay was: "The class dimension of politics" (Deppe 2001). It starts with the following thesis: Class analysis - during the past two decades - has not played an important role in Sociology and Political Science. Analyses of the social structure of the Federal Republic of Germany or theories of class formation have been rather neglected though there has been recently a modest increase in the interest of social scientists for the realities of social inequalities and processes of social exclusion - as a consequence of contemporary capitalism and neoliberal politics ( Bischoff et al. 2002; Kronauer 2002).

Interventions by famous sociologists - like (the late) Pierre Bourdieu who did not only attack "la pensée unique" (the unitary thinking of Neoliberalism) but also revealed its practical consequence: the "Misery of the World" - may have contributed to this change in public debates which at the same time have been impressed by the (still modest but growing) power and the dynamics of a new social movement, which - from Seattle (in 1999) to Porto Alegre (in 2002) - is articulating criticism of the global order (and the global contradictions) of capitalism, discussing alternatives to the "world as a commodity". So at least, we might say at the beginning, that the "new social question" connected to the new formation of global capitalism is about to find a political voice. Obviously, I will have to speak about this thesis more concretely at the end of this paper.

### 2.

Of course, everybody knows some of the factors that have influenced the present situation: the collapse of communism and the disappearance of the Soviet Union and die Soviet block until 1991 (perhaps one may add: the transformations in communist China at the same time) has seriously damaged the theories of Marx, Engels and Lenin of which the ruling communist parties had taken advantage to justify their system as well as their politics[1].

A second factor is closely connected to the history of the working class movement itself. In Europe for more than a hundred years - since the European Revolutions of 1848 - the political Left was mainly an expression of the working class movement, an expression of a relationship between political and social forces which was dominated by contradictory interests and aspirations between capital and labour (within "social blocques" including other classes and class fractions) and by class struggle. This history does not follow the logic of a straight evolution and modernisation / functional differentiation (as some sociologists from Max Weber to Jürgen Habermas have suggested); it is an but an uneven and discontinuous process, interrupted by periods of war, economic crisis, political dictatorship (fascism) and so on.

Yet, in Europe the traditional working class movement based upon the core of the industrial working class - a political movement (parties), a social movement (unions), a co-operative movement and a cultural movement - does not exist any more[2]. We still have trade unions as working class organisations (and still the voting behaviour of working class people rather supports left wing parties, but it has become more and more difficult to qualify social democratic parties and their leader as representatives of left-wing, i.e. socialist, politics). However, the universal and emancipatory character of the working class movement as a social movement has been broken up since quite a long time. So a socialist or a communist working class movement (executing its "historical mission" as a "gravedigger of capitalism", this was the formula of the "Communist Manifesto of Marx and Engels in 1848) does not exist any more as a relevant political force in the developed capitalist countries. This does not mean, that there are no classes, no working class, no class struggle - there is all of it, but it does not find the political expression, that

especially the theory of Marxism-Leninism ascribed to the relationship between the avant-garde party and the proletarian class (Deppe 1999: 282ff.).

The struggle of the working class movement in and after the bourgeois revolution was at the beginning directed towards the achievement of basically political and democratic rights (rights to organise, to negotiate, to vote). In the course of the 20th century the Working Class movement in Western Europe (after the Second World War) achieved elements of "social citizenship". This was an important element of the transformation of developed capitalism by social democracy. The Fordist formation of Golden-Age-Capitalism was a product of class struggle and expressed a specific relationship of class forces regulated by the democratic (still capitalist) state (it was also a product of the existence of the Soviet Union and the Socialist system, of the Cold War, as an element of global relations of class forces). It was the working class which - especially after the Second World War - enforced a class compromise with democracy, the modern welfare state and basic elements of workers' and trade unions' rights ("social democracy", participation, co-determination etc.) as the key elements.

On the other hand it was the "modernization" of capitalist societies itself. Modern society has become more complex; conflicts in elements of crisis in these societies reach beyond class conflicts. Traditional "class milieus" (as we say: class cultures in living quarters, in the factories, education styles, every day cultures and so on) have eroded. The sociologist Ulrich Beck has analysed such processes in his influential study on "Risk Society" (1986) as a process "individualisation" by "de-traditionalization... beyond class". I do not fully agree with Beck; but obviously he has summarised the position of most of sociologists who in the past decades were concerned with the class structures of modern capitalist societies of the West.

To the social historians of the working class movement these facts are not altogether new[3]. The British historian Donald Sassoon: publishes in 1997 a book entitled: "One Hundred Years of Socialism. The West European Left in the Twentieth Century". His basic thesis might be summarised like this: the socialist working class movement in Western Europe has fulfilled its historical task to civilise capitalism by democracy and the welfare state. At the end of the 20th century however the industrial working class is only a minority fraction of the wage-earning (and unemployed) population; it has ceased to be the motor, the "power house" of socialism. Yet, as the achievements of civilised capitalism have come under siege, under attack by neoliberalism (since the victory of Thatcherism in Britain) the main task of the Left has become to defend these achievements (or parts of it); we may however doubt, if Tony Blair and New Labour is defending civilisation or executing its destruction (even in his own Labour Party he is by now confronted with growing resistance not only to his foreign policy but to his plans to reform public services by partially privatisation).

The problem that arises from such realities has been precisely formulated by the editors of the Socialist Register (Leo Panitch and others) in the preface to the 2001 edition dedicated to the subject: "Working classes. Global realities". On the one hand global (social and political) reality concerning working classes is extremely complex and differentiated - according to the regional and/or national development of capitalism. This means: "As a set of social relations, then, 'class' is as central to understand the dynamics of contemporary capitalism as it has ever been". On the other hand, regarding "class as a political relation - in the sense of workers consciously forming a class in so far as they engage in a common battle against another class, i.e. as an agency advancing political and economic alternatives to neoliberalism and capitalism - remains deep in crisis" (Panitch et al. 2001: VIII)[4].

### 3.

Before going more into detail of these contradictions inherent to the subject I would like to formulate a few questions. What could we learn from Marxism to understand, to explain and (perhaps) to overcome those contradictions? Does the end of the traditional working-class movement (which was indeed a rather pure European phenomenon) mean that the working classes, class struggle and class movements do no more exist and thus cannot have a future? Of course, there have been working class movements outside Europe, for instance in Korea beginning under Japanese occupation. Yet, it seems that none of these movements outside Europe (even in the United States of America) followed exactly the paths which were outlined by early capitalist industrialisation and the "Making of the Working Class" (E. P. Thompson) in Europe.

My thesis, which I would like to strengthen in the following parts of my paper, is that we are living in period of transition to a new formation of capitalism, in the structure of modern societies, in the system of world politics, in the relationship between accumulation and political regulation. It is a period of transition with a clear hegemonic structure: which we characterise by the terms of neoliberalism and American unilateralism. One even might say that never in history of the past century the relationship of forces between capital and labour has so dramatically shifted in favour of capital; never in the past century the forces fighting for a non-capitalist society and for radical democracy were so weak as they are in this period of transition after the collapse of the Soviet block.

The future of the working class (and this includes: the future of modern societies and the world system) will be

largely determined by the way in which forces of the working class and (social movement) alliances between working class fractions and other class fractions (all over the world) react to the specifically capitalist contradictions of this period of transition articulating an alternative mode of social reproduction and democracy.

Before discussing these questions more concretely I would like to add that - regarding the character of my contribution - I have to confine myself to sketch very briefly to some aspects which may be important for the debate. So, I would like you to understand my contribution as an outline of a research agenda for studying and discussing global working class problems.

#### 4.

Let me very briefly remind you of some of the principles of Historical Materialism analysing capitalism and working class movements. The evidence of social inequality and class antagonism in capitalism was very well known before Marx: Rousseau devoted his famous "Second Discourse" (1754) to this question[5]; and Hegel - in his famous "Philosophy of Law" (in the articles 245 and 246) sketched the dialectics of civil society which is torn into the antagonism of wealth and poverty. These dialectics - Hegel concluded - do drive civil society beyond itself, which for the left-wing "Heglian scholars" meant a new society which has abolished private property, classes and misery. Historical Materialism claimed to give a scientific basis to the explanation of social inequality in its specific form (as class antagonism) within modern capitalism.

Georg Lukacs - in his famous essay (History and Class Consciousness, 1923) - remarked that Marxism is a scientific concept of the totality of society (we should not forget this in present times when - especially in Political Sciences - institutionalism or rational-choice-individualism dominates methodological outlooks and approaches). This means: the anatomy of bourgeois society (which is political economy) reveals - in a very broad sense - the social content or the class content of political, cultural, intellectual phenomena. So, one of the most important phrases of the analysis of "Capital" is this: "capital" is not a "thing" (a product, technology, money), but a social relationship, a class relationship between productive - but dependent - wage labour and the appropriation of surplus labour under specific conditions of the development of the productive forces (which means: the historical level of science, technology and qualification of the labour force).

If capital is a social relationship, then the historical process of capital accumulation is a process comprising and unfolding the contradictions of this social relationship (the concrete forms depending on manifold specific conditions: regional, national, intensity of class struggles, political organisation etc. pp.). The history (as well as the future) of the working class, therefore, is (some kind) of a dependent variable of capital accumulation and its contradictions. The size of the working class, its inner structure, its distribution over the world, its relationships to other classes are (historically) dynamic elements of processes of class formation which are shaped by the structure and dynamics of capital accumulation.

In the history of the working classes we find different fractions of the working class which exert the role of "avantgardes" in trade unions and political organisations or in strikes and other struggles; we find changes in the structure of unions: for instance, from craft unions to - Fordist - mass production unions with its semi-qualified workers different role of Services, private and public, male and female workers have played a different role - also unemployment in periods of crisis and the increase in precarious jobs outside the official labour markets. All these aspects which we meet while analysing history and social structure of the working class itself are closely linked to the economic processes of accumulation itself. On the whole: each period of capitalist development (and each national/regional configuration of it) is characterised by a specific relationship of class forces, of specific conditions of class struggle. Of course, these processes - remembering the totality of society which is the object of Historical Materialism - are also structured and shaped by the state - more generally, they are filtered through the political system and through political struggle for transforming power relations within the political system.

This leads to a rather important conclusion. Though Historical Materialism suggests to direct our attention towards the economic and social content of political "superstructures" (class organisations are one important element of them), we should not be caught in the traps of mechanistic thinking and economism while analysing working class movements. Classes are not collective actors (marching through the streets with brass bands and waving red flags) [6]; and finally: class struggle is not (and has never been) a mere reflection of economic and social structures and contradictions (Deppe / Dörre 1991). The basic problem of modern social science, how to mediate structuralism and actor analysis, cannot be neglected by Historical Materialism.

The articulation of class interests in politics is a complex process of mediation between basic structures and the elements of superstructures. This - in my view - has been one of the important contributions of the Prison Notebooks of Antonio Gramsci to modern Marxist thought, which was translated to the analysis of modern capitalism by Nikos Poulantzas in the 70s, to the analysis of Ideology, of the modern State and (later) of Neoliberalism (for instance by the German philosopher Wolfgang Fritz Haug and his research project on ideology or by the British sociologist

Steward Hall in the 80s). So, the analysis of concrete historical situations (based upon Historical Materialism) must be very precise in respect to the different actors, their interests and projects, the factors that determine the relationship of forces, the stability of the political system etc. Gramsci spoke of the necessary exploration of the (national, local etc.) terrain upon which progressive forces of the working class are operating. We should keep this in mind. In our Marburg research group on European Integration we have learned - in this respect - a lot from the "neogramscian" Toronto School of International Politics - founded by Robert W. Cox, continued by Stephen Gill and others (Gill 1993; Cox 1998).

## 5.

I will now turn to the analysis of present capitalism. Of course, I have to restrain myself to a few questions. What do the structures and the dynamics of present capitalism mean for the structure of the working class, for the reproduction of contradictions and for the articulation of resistance on the basis of working class interests? I do assume that these tendencies will also give us some information about the (possible or probable) future of the working class in the 21st century.

There are still debates among Marxist economists and social scientist about the character of the transition of world capitalism to a new historical period or to a new formation of capitalism (Candeias / Deppe 2001). Yet, there exists a large consensus describing basic elements of present capitalism (which has grown out of the crisis of Fordism in the late 60es and 70es). I just mention a few of them:

\* The "microelectronic revolution" has largely transformed the character of work in industrial production as well as in services. On the whole it means first of all an immense increase in the productivity of labour (at the factory and branch level, not necessarily at the level of the economy as a whole), reducing substantially what Marx meant by necessary labour time[7]. For capitalist production therefore it implies an enormous potential of rationalisation, reducing costs of production, administration and management. On the other side it is the basis for potential reductions of working time (which has been and still is demanded by trade unions all over the world[8]) as well as for the increase unemployment since the 70s (though the book of Jeremy Rifkin: *The end of work*, 1995, has been very impressive, I do not share his basic assumption of technologically produced unemployment - it is not technology but profit production and the politics of government which are responsible for unemployment). Secondly it means a transformation in the character of wage labour as well as of the qualification of labour force: from the production of material goods to the production of information and knowledge. Thirdly this means a redistribution of labour from the industrial to the services sector which however is highly polarised between stable and unstable employment, high and low qualification, high and low paid jobs etc. On the whole, this revolution in the structure of productive forces is one of the factors determining the transition from industrial society to services society (with new sectors, like information and communication - "internet" - with enormous implications concerning "superstructures", the formation and effectiveness of ideology, reproduction of images of the world/of reality; think of CNN and the new Wars etc. pp. - unfortunately I do not have the time to go more into detail of this very important aspect of modern capitalism and its mechanisms of ideological reproduction which is so important for a high-tech-country like Korea).

\* Structure of accumulation: Capital accumulation has penetrated new sectors of life, social reproduction and culture which so far never had been submitted to commodity and profit production (especially in the media). The limits of the system of private property, of commodity and profit production which so intensely occupied (for instance) Rosa Luxemburg in her analysis of imperialism (before 1914), have been extremely enlarged. This process is accompanied by the extension of wage labour into new sectors. At the same time the weight of financial capital within the global reproduction of capitalism has grown. When we speak of shareholder capitalism or of the Dollar-Wall-Street-Regime (Peter Gowan) we speak of the structures (and the interdependence) of the world markets, of US-American dominance, but also of the growing importance of financial markets, financial operations, stock markets etc. for the regime of accumulation and for the (national) systems of corporate governance. In as far as the wage relationship is concerned (which is so important for Michel Agliettas concept of "Fordist regulation") it has been seriously devaluated: wages have come under pressure (by rationalisation, unemployment but also by the shift to financial activities and by government politics) and trade union have (at least in the USA and Western Europe since the end of the 70s) largely lost the power to change distribution between profits and wages and to fight successfully for a (continuous) increase in real wages (or, at least, realising wage increases according to the increase in productivity). Here, we find a close connection between the transformations in the structure of accumulation and the transformations in the relationship of class forces in developed capitalist societies.

\* The relationship between the capitalist economy and the State has been changed. Authors like Bob Jessop and Joachim Hirsch have thoroughly analysed this transformation from the "National Keynesian Welfare State" to the "Competitive State", which reacts to the pressure of transnational competition (Hirsch et al. 2001; Hirsch 2002). For the working class movement this means the erosion of the Fordist class compromise: a shift of economic, social, cultural, ideological power from labour to capital. The politics of neoliberalism - privatisation, deregulation, monetarism and supply side economics - execute the logic of competition and profit production. They impose the domination of market laws upon the political system and its decisions ("imperialism" of economics). In other words: the absolute dominance of neo-classical economic thought and theory. Politics - especially democracy - constitute

a permanent threat against the rationality of the "market laws". This is the (neoliberal) message of the textbooks distributed in social science and economics dominated by the "New Political Economy" and the ideology of rational choice and methodological individualism. The main functions of the "competitive state" - within world market competition - are a) deregulation of labour markets ("flexibility"; precarisation), and b) transformation of welfare politics in favour of private insurance and individualisation (in the place of collective solidarity, which was the principle of the working-class movement in respect to the welfare state); c) dismantling of workers' and trade unions' participation rights (or blocking further reforms in this sector: concerning workers' control by elected delegates/ shop stewards etc.; liberty to collective negotiations and self-administration of some social policy institutions). Deregulation and privatisation in the field of education and science does not only mean that capital interests are directly imposed upon the definition of effectiveness (in teaching and research); but that the access of working class people to these institutions (which was a result of social democratic reform politics in the 70es) will be largely reversed.

\* Present-day high-tech capitalism has reached a new stage of internationalisation or transnationalisation of production and exchange, of the mobility of capital, of information, of money and also of men (transnational migration). I am rather critical against some of the dominant discourses about "globalisation" and "Empire", but evidently capitalism in the past decades - after the end of systems' competition and the Cold War, because of the transformation of the economic and political structures of the "world system" structure - has entered a new period which has an enormous impact upon the social and class dimension of capitalist accumulation and reproduction. In as far as class relations are concerned I would like to mention only two aspects: a) For the Transnational Corporations (TNCs) - with the strategies of "global sourcing" - the scope of action - especially in relation to the workers and the unions - has been enlarged significantly. The exit option for capital is sometimes exaggerated; it does however exist and constitutes an instrument of pressure against the power of the workers. b) Neoliberal politics enforce the internalisation (at the factory or the national level) of world-market competition. Again this strengthens the position of management against workers, workers' councils and unions; their (strategical) weakness is reflected by a wider acceptance of the politics of "competitive corporatism" in the Western European trade-union movement (Bieling / Deppe 1999).

Obviously, we need a debate on "new imperialism"(Gowan, Panitch, Shaw 2001)[9]. This regime - dominated by the dynamics of the international financial markets (Huffschmid 2002) is highly aggressive (wars have come back) and highly unstable (acceleration of financial crises from East Asia, Mexico, Russia, Turkey to Latin American with the collapse of Argentine, Uruguay and serious problems in many other countries; enforced by the crisis of the financial system and the stock market in the USA and in Europe and Japan itself). Of course, working classes all over the world are struck severely by the consequences of these crises.

## 6.

Now, to conclude, what are the implications of our (of course, very fragmentary) analysis of contemporary capitalism for the subject of this paper: "the future of the working class in the 21st century"? How could we link these implications to our reflections on some methodological aspects of Marxist class analysis in part two of this paper?

Our first conclusion seems to be quite simple: the working class has not at all disappeared. Capitalism - though driven by the revolution of productive forces and world wide competition, though in a process of permanent and rapid change - still is dependent upon wage labour and the exploitation of it as well as of natural, social and political conditions which may be favourable for profit production and appropriation. The working class may have even grown in number during the past decade, for instance in the Soviet Union and the former socialist countries, but also in consequence of the economic boom in China. In the developed capitalist countries the rate of wage labour has reached 90 percent and more, though recently there been a tendency into the direction of creating new jobs for individual entrepreneurs which are formally independent but in reality hired by companies (which use them as cheap and temporary labour). On the other side the rate of women entering labour markets has significantly increased (especially in part-time labour and so-called precarious jobs). So, in general the thesis of the "workforce-entrepreneur" is exaggerated[10].

Yet, according to the title of a book by the French sociologist Robert Castels (2000), what is new, is a "metamorphosis of the social question". First of all, the notion of working-class - or even - of a global working class is extremely abstract; social and political analyses requires a multi-level approach. Working class (or elements of the working class) as an actor is constituted "from below", at the local/factory level, it operates (by its organisations) at the branch and national level while working class internationalism (and its respective organisations) have been quite important in the history of the working class movements but they also have been very fragile, subject to national interests and domination by powerful national parties or unions (remember the role of the German Social Democracy in the Second International before 1914 and the role of the PCSU of the Soviet Union in the Third International).

Secondly, the old working class movement believed that the growing of the working class (becoming the most numerous class of capitalist society) implied an equal process of alignment of working and living condition, of qualification and class consciousness. This never was correct. Yet, today working class structures are extremely fragmented - at the different levels I mentioned before. Whereas "Fordism" was still characterised by universal standards (for mass production and for the reproduction of the labour force), Postfordism, neoliberal globalisation reinforces the split between winners and looser, between upper and lower classes and (which - for our subject - is even more important) within the working class itself, between capitalist centres and the periphery and within the centres itself.

If capital accumulation is conceived as a process of the reproduction of class relations and class conflicts then today, in the context of neoliberal globalisation, these contradictions appear in the unequal distribution of wealth and poverty (social polarisation which has increased enormously during the past three decades), in the existence and steady growth (though it must be differentiated according to regions and countries) of mass unemployment and underemployment (with enormous costs and social and cultural consequences), growing insecurity for working class people (caused by unemployment, dismantling of welfare politics, economic and financial crises, risk of war in many parts of the world), mass migration of the poorest of the world, creation of jobs in the marginal - and highly flexible - sectors of the labour market (i.e. so-called precarious - part-time employment, mainly for women, without social protection and without trade union power for collective bargaining); in consequence: individualisation (a kind of relapse to early capitalism and liberalism which is of course painted gold by the dominant neoliberal ideologies of our times) and weakening of the traditional (collective) organisation of the working class movements, especially trade unions.

By the way, this is what Robert Castel meant by the metamorphosis of the social question. In present capitalism class conflict does not manifest itself in the clash between a (rather) homogenous (industrial) working class and a block of bourgeoisie, aristocracy and petty bourgeoisie. Capital accumulation today (even in the centres) produces - supported by the political strategies of neoliberalism, i.e. deregulation and flexibilisation - a permanent destabilisation of the working conditions and the exclusion of a growing part of the population (especially of young people) which no more function as a reserve army for the labour market but which constitute a growing superfluous population dependent upon state subsidies or upon informal labour (including crime and other forms of deviant reproduction). This is what the French author Viviane Forrester, a few years ago, called "the economic horror".

## 7.

Contemporary capitalism is a highly dynamic economic and social system that implies a process of the restructuring, re-composition of the working class - in a horizontal dimension (transcending national boundaries), and in a vertical (hierarchical) dimension. Transnational High Tech Capitalism and Neoliberalism constitute a (new) "block of subordinates"[11]. At the top of this social block we find fractions of the wage earning middle class and "aristocratic" workers with high qualification, more and more in the services sectors of information and technology. Robert Reich called them "symbol analysts". Most of them follow middle class lifestyles and cultures; they largely support neoliberal ideology and politics. Yet, many of them also are open to ideas of the new social movements (feminism, ecology) and support Green parties. A second fraction is the traditional industrial working class (with different subsections), the dominant fraction within the labour movement during the Fordist period of capitalism. The fraction has diminished in size. Its lower strata belong to the losers of postfordist transformation. Yet, in some countries, they still have quite strong unions and enjoy a relatively stable employment. Many unions defend their interests in a rather "corporatist" (and conservative) manner (i.e. defending their relatively privileged position within the working class). Company unions - other than branch or general unions - are more inclined to these politics.

A third fraction consists of low qualified and paid - to a large extent part-time - workers in the lower segments of the services sectors services. The majority of these workers are women, many of them migrants from very poor countries - either from Eastern Europe or from "Third World countries" in Africa, Latin America and Asia. The increase of this kind of "precarious employment" (without stability of employment, without social security and trade union representation) has produced the female fraction of the "working poor" within the working class. Recently Barbara Ehrenreich (2001) has analysed so impressively their conditions of labour and life. Finally we should not forget the real "underclass" (these who are condemned to reproduce themselves outside the official system of work and of social subsidies). Its existence and growth is largely determined by the continuous expansion of the so-called "informal sector" - in the periphery as well as in the centres of capitalism (Dickinson / Schaeffer 2002).

These fractions / strata of this "block of subordinates" are unequally distributed over the world - not only between centres and periphery (where the informal sectors and the masses of landless and poor peasant play a much more important role), but also between the "global cities" with their huge population, especially of young people), rather traditional industrial and rural regions and newly industrialised regions which (at least in the past two or three decades) where centres of the fast growing "new economy" ("Silicon Valley" and others). Mobility between these

different strata and spaces (regions) - combined with the growing importance of gender and race as determinant of lower class status - works as a force a) to erode traditional class consciousness and class solidarity, and b) to obstruct the processes of creating new solidarities in and between fractions of the (global) working class.

## 8.

All over the world the contradictions of global capitalism (as experienced by the working class) have led to different forms of resistance, trade union activities, general strikes and mass demonstrations as well as to a more intense intellectual criticism of neoliberalism. Of course, the content of these conflicts varies considerably according to the specific conditions within global capitalism and within the "block of subordinates": protest of landless peasants in Brasilia, die Chiapas insurrection, resistance of peasants against the privatisation of access to water (in Peru) - trade union strikes and demonstrations for higher wages and social security (in Germany this year), mass demonstrations and general strikes in Italy and Spain against unemployment, dismantling of the welfare state and right-wing, bonapartist governments (like that of Berlusconi in Italy).

In a recent article, Stephen Gill (2001) has analysed the new social movements articulating the criticism and the alternatives to the project of neoliberal globalisation from Seattle, in 1999 to the World Social Forum in Porto Alegre in 2002 (cf. Green / Griffith 2002; Seona / Taddei 2002; Waterman 2002). He pointed out four groups of contradictions upon which protest and resistance focuses:

1. The contradictions between Big Capital and democracy. The demonstrations since Seattle have severely attacked the politics of international organisations like WTO, World Bank, IMF, OECD, European Union etc. - which create optimal condition of free movement of capitals, for world wide protection of property rights (MAI) at the expense of national sovereignty and democracy as well as of workers rights and social security of the peoples.
2. Disciplinary Neoliberalism proceeds while intensifying work and exploitation. At the same time economic and financial crises all over the world have impoverished millions of people. This contradiction explains the growing resistance of trade unions against neoliberalism - not only in the USA ("Seattle") but also in Western Europe where at least during the past two or three years every important summit of the European Union was accompanied by mass demonstrations demanding another politics for "Social Europe".
3. A third group of contradictions is related to an intensification of the crisis of the modes of social reproduction. Especially feminist political economy has shown (Dickinson / Schäffer 2001), how poverty at the periphery and the dismantling of welfare politics in the centres of capitalism first of all hits women and their work of reproduction (in the households). New forms of global exploitation of women's work and women's bodies (by prostitution, housework etc.) characterise everywhere the growing informal sector of the economy.
4. A fourth group of contradictions finally raises the issue of the activities of transnational corporations in the field of food industries monopolising the control over food which has been grown by methods of Biological Engineering and genetic manipulation (with is extended to very new forms of the control of there body, that why Hardt and Negri speak - remembering Foucault - of "biopolitics"). This issue - for instance - played an important role in the demonstrations against the politics of WTO and OECD (which secretly discussed the Multinational Agreement on Investment, MAI) as well as in the mass meeting of Porto Alegre in the South of Brasilia, at the beginning of this year.

## 9.

Thus, to conclude, the content of resistance and struggles which has become manifest in the new social movements against neoliberal globalisation may be understood as some kind of an embryonic articulation of the future of social, political, economic, ecological and cultural conflicts in which the working class will have to play an important (I would like to say: an indispensable) role. These conflicts and struggles focus upon democracy and sovereignty, upon distribution and redistribution of wealth, information, education, health, access to good water, fresh air and other natural resources. "Re-embedding" the economy into institutions of social and political control demands first of all to stop the process of totalising commodification which is connected to the logic of deregulation, profit production and market radicalism. More positively it means that democracy and civilisation need a large sectors of de-commodification (i.e. of access to public goods for everybody)[12], a large sector of de-commodified labour markets (especially in the field of education and science, health care, infrastructure and so on).

Stephen Gill describes the different potentials of the recent protest movements as the "Postmodern Prince". Of course, here he follows Gramsci's reflections on Machiavelli and his concept of the communist (Leninist) party as the "Modern Prince" (Deppe 1987: 421ff.). The function of the "Modern Prince" - according to Gramsci - was to build a "block of subordinates" at the national level, mainly of workers and peasants, enable them to fight for a progressive hegemony and a new social order, a New State. The "organic intellectuals" are indispensable for the formation of this "block", for the knowledge and the consciousness of a new order. The "Postmodern Prince", however, is - according to Gill - more pluralistic, much more differentiated, transnational - a complex pattern of social and political forces moving forward. Its function is to build alliances between these forces and movements,

organise communication and activities, raise consciousness about the relationship and interdependence of conflicts and activities which at first sight might be completely different from each other (women's activities in India, peasant struggles in Latin America, workers resistance in Western Europe). Indeed, these activities are bound together by common interests and aims grown in the resistance against the world wide dominance of capital and of the politics of neoliberal deregulation. Again - in a Gramscian sense - it is today the role of the critical intellectual to articulate the self-consciousness of this new alliance of social, political and cultural forces.

We should think and act into this direction when we are asking for answers to the question: what will be the future role of the working class in the capitalist world system of the 21st century.

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[1] Even before the crisis of the socialist and communist parties (and unions) in Western Europe was evident: the victory of Thatcher in Britain signified not only the beginning of a period of neoliberal hegemony, but also of serious defeats of the working class movement. The last section of Eric Hobsbawm's "Age of Extremes" is entitled "The Landslide" which means that the world "lost its bearings and slid into instability and crisis" (Hobsbawm 1994: 403). It begins in the middle of the 70es.

[2] This is not a very surprising diagnosis. Historians of the working class movement have engaged in debates about fixing the period in which the old movement disappeared or eroded: some believe it was before the Second World (in Germany - for instance - in 1933, the year which marked the defeat of the German working class movement by fascism from which - some say - it never really recovered); others - mainly sociologists - attributed the erosion class consciousness to the Gold-Age period of postwar c Capitalism. In 1971 I published a book on "Workers Consciousness", criticizing such views before the background of the renaissance of class struggle in Western Europe after 1965.

[3] In 1984 I published a book entitled "Ende oder Zukunft der Arbeiterbewegung" which was my contribution to the debate upon the "Farewell to the Proletariat" (this was the title of André Gorz' book) or the "End of the working class movement" which was the slogan of many other books and articles. In 1981 I published an essay "Einheit und Spaltung der Arbeiterklasse. Überlegungen zu einer politischen Geschichte der Arbeiterbewegung".

[4] cf. Frank Deppe, Ein "Gespenst geht um.", in: Eric Hobsbawm, Samir Amin et. al., *Das Manifest - heute*, Hamburg 1998, S. 234ff. The memory of the 150th anniversary of the "Communist Manifesto" (of Marx and Engels, 1848) was quite interesting: on the one hand the authors were praised for their precise outlook on the future of capitalist globalisation; on the other hand their political outlook (on the coming proletarian revolution and the creation of a new, classless society) was denounced as a huge misunderstanding (with fatal consequences). This is not quite correct. The 20th century could be - as Eric Hobsbawm did in his "Age of Extreme" - interpreted as the century which is characterised by the reality (October 1917) or the permanent (of course, changing) pressure of proletarian and antiimperialist revolution.

[5] His conclusion was: " Il suit de cet exposé que l'inégalité, étant presque nulle dans l'état de nature, tire sa force et son accroissement du développement de nos facultés et des progrès de l'esprit humain, et devient en fin stable et légitime par l'établissement de la propriété et des lois" (p. 92).

[6] It was the Marxism of the Second International (before 1914) - interpreted by the authority of Karl Kautsky - which believed firmly in the "natural laws" of capitalist development and class struggle leading to socialism. Behind this belief stood the victories of the early working class movement (not only in Germany) and their continuous successes in organizing a mass movement. So they believed that the "iron laws" of history (progress) were on the side of the working-class and socialism. Between the wars this concept still inspired the Third International, but also Hilferding's Theory of "Organized Capitalism" as an introductory phase to socialism.

[7] In a famous passage of "Grundrisse", Karl Marx (1953: 592ff.) has precisely described this contradiction on the basis of the transformation of science into an immediate productive force. Marx clearly shows how the market mechanism transforms this process of emancipation from heavy and monotonous physical labour leads to unemployment and mass poverty; only the creation of an sector of decommodified labour could transform free time into a progress of social organisation.

[8] In Germany - in 1984 - it was the strong metal workers' union (IG Metall) and the media union (IG Medien) which went on a six weeks' strike to open the door for the 35-hours-week.

[9] Cf. for example the transnational debate on "Empire" by Hardt and Negri (2000).

[10] This notion "workforce-entrepreneur" also refers to the new image of wage labour transferring responsibility and autonomy to the single worker/employee in the company who may be free to decide how to organize his work etc. pp. This is - in my opinion - highly ideological (though a reflection of the great debate on individualisation in sociology) because it may veil the fact that in reality more individual freedom in the workplace means more stress, more (indirect) pressure - may be a new model of hegemony because it requires a person who identifies totally with his work and the company. May be the ideal model of neoliberalism for self-exploitation without resistance!

[11] Gramsci spoke of the "blocco di subalterni" and was of course thinking of the alliance between the poor peasants of the South and the industrial workers of the North of Italy.

[12] I only remind you of the book of Gösta Esping-Anderson on "Three Worlds of Welfare Capitalism" where he uses these categories to differentiate between three types of the European Welfare State (according to the level of de-commodification).

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