

Uli Schöler: The Present and Future of Marxist Theory

The impact of the collapse of the East European Soviet system on Marxist theoretical reflection has yet to be clarified even ten years later. To shed light on this question the author begins his impressive study with an analysis of the writings of Marx and Engels, and their views of the transformation process from capitalist to socialist societies. According to Schöler most of the critical findings of Marx and Engels with regard to the capitalist mode of production are still valid. But they were unable to provide any useful advice on the ›transformation problem‹. This is – according to Schöler – due to their over stressing the so-called property-question. Following the recent dramatic upheavals in Eastern Europe, it would appear more obvious than ever, that who owns the means of production is of far less importance than who commands them and what these means are used for.

Ulrich Weiss: Marx and the possibility of socialism

In analyzing the failure of »State Socialism« Ulrich Weiss arrived at the conclusion that this social system never really was socialist. After the revolution of 1917 it was perhaps true that the working class was able to expropriate the bourgeoisie, but it was in fact unable to become the real owners of the industrial means of production. The newly invented ›peoples property‹ in reality was state property, remaining in nature capitalist and the proletariat remained proletariat. If Marx's original fundamental question – how to overcome capitalism and build a socialist society – were returned to today's agenda, we should have learned some important lessons: First, modern, post-fordist production organization has paved the way toward overcoming monotonous working regimes as well as opened the door to various forms of autonomous activities. Second, to achieve a fundamental change in social systems, we obviously need new forms of social movements – the old-style political parties, and trade unions are no longer useful. And thirdly, that such new emancipatory movements already exist, their main focus is not on typical class-bound interests but on questions of serious relevance to all human beings.

Ulla Plener: Social Justice needs Democracy in the Economy

A comprehensive approach to the issue of social justice must also include the problems of human dignity and freedom from oppressive forms of dependence. Within the political economy of workers' movements or the left, in general, the question of social justice has been closely linked to the struggle for democratic participation in the decision-making process and the greatest possible equality in the appropriation of produced goods and income. The author also argues that the modern capitalist state is obliged to legislate the insurance that workers and employees can influence decision-making in all social spheres regarding their social interests. They should also have the right to exercise (to a certain extent) control over decisive economic developments.

Dietrich Wahl: Political and economic democracy – the Phaleas-syndrom

Ancient Greek and Chinese scholars have long been aware that politics, morality and social necessities are intertwined with the economic order. Living together in peace and justice requires equality of private property or common ownership of the means of production. This article gives a brief outline of the development of this vital problem in human history: The first part focuses on pre-modern societies while the second handles modern ›capitalist‹ and ›socialist‹ societies. The problem itself has evolved and become more profound in accordance with the evolution of social structures. Counter-arguments expressing the perspective of ruling classes have altered correspondingly. Egalitarian and socialist concepts have been carried out in practice repeatedly in pre-modern (part 1) as well as in modern societies (part 2). The failure of such communities does not prove a lack of feasibility, but should rather be understood as a challenge to further contemplate the problem of transformation. Part 1 appeared in our September 2000 issue.

Kay Müller: Social Property as an Option

From the beginning of the labor movement, the struggle against capitalist private property has been of outstanding importance. In particular, different socialist movements – revolutionary as well as reformist – have regarded socialization of property as a means of breaking the trend of a growing polarization between rich and poor. Even though the failure of state socialism in Central and Eastern Europe has discredited the concept of creating social property, Kay Müller argues that modern socialist parties should at least keep open the option of socializing the means of production.

Michael Chrapa: Everyday Solidarity and latent Racism

In his recent study on »vulnerable groups« in East Germany – especially in the German state Saxony-Anhalt – Michael Chrapa, a sociologist and director of the FOKUS- (social research) Institute polled 1405 men and women about their opinions and behavior toward those, who for various reasons do not fully participate in all spheres of social life, i.e. on the one hand, the unemployed, the handicapped or the elderly, but also on the other hand, gays, lesbians, drug addicts, and victims of crimes. Chrapa arrived at very interesting but contradictory findings. A great majority of the interviewed persons expressed solidarity especially with those, who are Germans and who came have difficulties or are handicapped through no fault of their own. Strong rejection was expressed against mostly foreigners, gays, lesbians, and drug addicts. About 30 percent of those questioned – among them also supporters of left parties – were extremely xenophobic or frankly racist.