

HARALD WERNER

Social Reality and Neo-liberal Consciousness

In his essay Harald Werner describes the triumphant advance of neo-liberal economic thought in the society as a sort of self-fulfilling prophesy. The ›holy spirit‹, competition, has been freed from the narrow sphere of economics and has spread to the entire society. But the notion of an intensified, generalised competition in social reality remains rooted in economic relations. And it is in the arena of the real production process where workers are being told that the performance of the firm in competition on the world market depends heavily on their personal commitment. This aspect combined with rapid technological changes, particularly the intensification of the work process, leads to a growing social chasm. On the one hand, there are more and more overworked, super-exploited employees while on the other side a growing number of women and men is entirely excluded from the process of production. Moreover neo-liberal ideas create the impression in the populace that the jobless are simply lazy and live at the expense of those hard workers plagued with more and more overtime. To overcome this madness of ›saint competition‹ Harald Werner argues that it is first of all necessary to break the hegemony of neo-liberal thinking in the political arena.

ANDRÉ BRIE

On the Future of Work – An Alternative Agenda for Full Employment

Not long ago, both the left and conservatives shared the idea that modern capitalist societies were confronted with ›the end of work‹, i.e. the continuing and accelerating process of technological change would inevitably simply render a growing number of persons unnecessary for the production of sufficient goods and services. In his article, André Brie, who is member of the European Parliament for the (German) Party of Democratic Socialism, argues that this perception (dating from the 1980s and 1990s) of the future of work is no longer valid. He argues that, if economic and labour policies are reshaped, a ›new kind of full employment‹ is possible in the form of a ›new policy of distribution‹ inspired by an ›enlarged understanding of social justice‹. Cornerstones of this policy are seen to be that (full) employment can no longer be based either on an (accelerated) economic growth nor on the patriarchal model of the male breadwinner. Rather than an augmentation of overtime and a rising number of unemployed, a general reduction of work hours combined with the higher valorisation of social services (to be financed through living wages) appears to be not only a necessity but also a possibility.

JÜRGEN STAHL

Private Housing and the Left

Very much in contrast to common left positions stigmatising private housing as a petit bourgeois idyllic refuge, this article sets out to develop a rational left position on the issue. The promotion of different types of housing – taking into consideration economic, social, ecological, cultural, and demographic factors – has long become a challenge confronting all political movements. From this perspective, the promotion of private housing owned by the residents – as opposed to ownership by capital investors – is seen as a sustainable means to improve the living standard. It includes elements of both responsibility for one's own housing and decision making in residential areas at the grass roots level. In addition, the question is raised of whether private housing, owned by residents, would make a significant contribution to socialisation of property and, thus, constitute a step beyond existing social orders. In this context, the author undertakes a critical analyses of Engels' paper ›The Housing Question‹.

WOLF GÖHRING:

E-Commerce and Information Society

Design, production and commerce of goods are reflected in integrated and world-wide extending data bases. He outlines the political economy of this development and projects it – based on MARX' analysis of merchandise – into the future: The technical networking renders that exchange in products and exchange value obsolete. Individuals will have their common social productivity subsumed into their common capacity to weave their labour into a net of agreements.

HELGE MEVES:

Steam engine capitalism and internet

This essay debates the three new drafts of a party program for the German Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS) in relationship to their treatment of information technologies and internet. To demonstrate the points in this interesting debate, Helge Meves describes the Toyota management model and the Cluetrain manifesto, amazon.com and Quelle mail-order group, Microsoft and Basmati rice monopolies. The points of interest are the new tasks within the networks and the potentials of the two-way-mass-communication internet. Both traditional capitalist and socialist versions of enterprises have always been based on the assumption that centralised control of economic activity is desirable and necessary, which is why an excursion is made in the discussion to the important debate in the socialist movement since 19th century about the value of the centralist organisation of steam engine capitalism leading to the current western information capitalism. To the benefit of a current left socialist program, the essay sets out to highlight the potentials of information technology and names dead ends in the criticisms.

VIOLA SCHUBERT-LEHNHARDT:

Women's Self-Determination and Genetic Engineering

Genetic engineering offers a range of potentially new solutions that have strongly re-emphasized the question of whether humankind should be allowed to do everything that it potentially could do. Ethical answers to challenges provoked by new methods for human reproduction strongly stress concepts such as self-determination (of women and couples) and responsibility. This article considers the history of both concepts and analyses their different current interpretations. It shows that their understanding has always been influenced by social contexts as well as by prevailing conceptions of humankind and social values. The use of the latest medical technologies does not at all imply a straightforward development of human freedom and civil rights but requires careful decisions, particularly in market-driven societies.

Ilja Seifert:

The Dignity of Human Life and Human Genome Research

January 30, 2002 the German Federal Parliament (Bundestag) took a decision to import - for purposes of research in Germany - human embryonic stem cells. In his essay, Ilja Seifert, member of the Federal Parliament for the Party of Democratic Socialism, discusses ethical, medical, economic, scientific, and political pros and cons of that decision to proceed with genome research in Germany. In weighing different views and arguments, he arrives at the conclusion that any research on the human genome should be banned. It would be much better to use the financial and the material resources devoted to genome research to promote projects aimed at improving the living conditions of the ill and handicapped. In view of the enormous potential of modern medicine Seifert pleads for legal regulations to insure that no one would be discriminated against because of his genome disposition.

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