

Ľuboš Blaha

ANTI-GLOBALISM v. ALTER-GLOBALISM

PANEL: „Assessments of Liberal-Egalitarian, Social-Democratic, Democratic Socialist, Marxist, and Left-Wing Anarchist Political Philosophies.“

In my paper I would like to concentrate on the main cleavage in the contemporary Left-Wing Thinking which is the issue of globalization. The most recent polemic is the dispute between the anti-globalist and the alter-globalist Left.

Among the **anti-globalists**, many traditional social-democratic parties and the more orthodox Communist parties (the so-called Old left) have rejected economic globalization in its neoliberal shape and have also questioned political globalization technocratic trends, including European integration like the EU. The fundamental aim of the Old Left is to return to the protection and social functions of the state. This is manifested either by an attempt to return to classical welfare states that will have control over investment flows and will not be afraid to use protectionism in favour of their population (the Orthodox Communists attempt to return to real socialism), and hence by an attempt to de-globalize, and thus to cut off from globalization pressures, market dictates, dominance of multinational corporations, and neo-liberal trends that lead to a race to the bottom in the sphere of social and environmental protection.

Leftist anti-globalists are usually extremely critical to the European Union, which they see as a neo-liberal project and seek alternative in more progressive forms of regional cooperation, internationalism, respect for national specifics and importance for the local economy and the role of the state in the economy. Although they follow the priorities of the Old left, their current proposals are applied to the current economic setting: it is not about nostalgic sobs, but progressive alternatives.

The second answer of the Left to global capitalism are the so-called **alter-globalist** flows. Unlike anti-globalists, these groups do not reject globalization as such, but they proclaim their resistance to neoliberal globalization, which should be – according to them – replaced by another, more social variant of globalization. Alter-globalist currents include libertarian socialists from the environment of the so-called New Left, various kinds of neo-Marxists, humanists, Trotskyists, partly anarchists and other radical activists, including ecologists, feminists, and anti-fascists.

However, the alter-globalist movement also includes reformist movements, including relatively moderate leftists in the style of Stiglitz and Sachs, who, after their inner birth, call for globalization with a human face. The fundamental program goal is the thesis that another world is possible: alter-globalists call for global social justice and mostly tend to cosmopolitanism. In relation to the EU, they are often less critical, appreciating the effort for Europeanisation.

Globalization has therefore put a new, conflicting line in the Left, according to which the different political streams are distinguished. We can speak in general about a dispute between national (or sub-national or supranational) protectionism (anti-globalists) and the global cosmopolitan social movement (alter-globalists).

My position in this dispute is ANTI-GLOBALIST – that's also the name of my new book. The starting point of my argumentation is typically Marxist: it's **the class division** of society.

The question of class division of society has recently become a taboo of social sciences. As Fredric Jameson has complained, denouncing of the social classes concept has become an obligatory equipment of social theories even for Marxists despite the fact that the class division of society continues to be a reality that persists even in the post-cold-war era. Moreover, Jameson rejects the statements that the transnational division of labour no longer has any meaning; he also rejects the thesis that gender, race and ethnicity are currently more important factors that create the identity of actors. According to him, sex and race are too easily reconcilable with the terms of liberal ideology, its technocratic solutions to social problems, and the types of policies it offers.¹ I agree with Jameson's

¹ See Jameson, F.: *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. Duke University Press, Durham 1991, pp.319-20. See also COMAROFF, J., COMAROFF, J.L. (eds): *Millennial Capitalism and the Culture of Neoliberalism*. Duke University Press, Durham 2011, pp.10-11.

argumentation and I consider the question of the classes as crucial in analysing modern society and global capitalism.

The class position determines many value attitudes, including the attitudes towards national versus global identities.

The lower middle class is one of the most educated social strata that often seeks its application beyond the borders of its native state, likes to travel, recognizes other cultures, disrespects exaggerated nationalism, or more conservative stereotypes. It thinks in abstractions, and it considers as its moral duty to manifest certain amount of idealism. The values of the middle classes are naturally cosmopolitanism, meritocracy and liberal freedoms.

Harvey describes it as follows: "The bourgeoisie, as Marx and Engels so convincingly show, arrived at its own distinctive form of cosmopolitanism (now represented by the frequent flier corporate and business elite, the global accountants and consultants, the employees of international institutions, professional and technological elites, and the like) by revolutionizing the geography of capital accumulation."² The attitude of middle classes towards neoliberal globalization results from their lifestyle, which is close to cosmopolitan ideals. Craig Calhoun calls current global capitalism "an elite project reflecting the class consciousness of frequent travellers. As such, it more and more appears as the latest effort to revive liberalism in an era of neoliberal capitalism."³

On the contrary, **poorer strata** anywhere in the world still unwinds from belonging to their community, state or nation, they have more realistic attitudes and less political correctness. It is related to their life perspective, which in most cases does not allow them to find employment beyond the borders of their state, not to mention the economic position that prevents them from traveling and learning other cultures. Economic globalization and the opening of world markets are a threat for them, not an opportunity. As Dani Rodrik writes: "If you are of low skill, have little education, and are not very mobile, international trade has been bad news for you and pretty much throughout your entire life."⁴

The life world of such people is more brutal and their attitudes more practical. They are much more sceptical about globalization. The values of the poor classes are mostly community, equality and solidarity.

Although liberal urban intelligence and postmodern activists may not like it, many ordinary working people have and probably will have rather conservative, authoritarian and intolerant attitudes. In the past, prominent sociologists have spoken of the so-called authoritarianism of the working class.⁵ This also includes a greater tendency towards patriotic attitudes, communitarianism or traditionalism. Such are many people from the lower classes, whether we like it or not.

I do not claim that global identity inevitably contradicts the attitudes of ordinary people, and not at all, that it must necessarily be reconciled with nationalism, whether local, state or regional. I only say that the strategy of cosmopolitan globalization (including progressive alter-globalism), which calls for a radical overthrow of national identity in order to create a global identity, overlooks one rather embarrassing fact: when we get rid of the nation state, the only currently available realistic alternative is the unlimited dominance of multinational corporations, not a cosmopolitan global welfare (socialist) state. Alternatives do not arise by simply dreaming them. While the neoliberal globalization model will not have a real counterweight, it is the duty of the Left to defend the state and not to break down the identities that hold it together.

To attack the nation state is therefore more in the interest of global capital than in the interest of anyone else in this historical phase. It comes as no surprise that the snobby right-wing media applaud whenever the confused social liberals denotes every defence of the nation-state as a manifestation of nationalism or fascism. Such manipulative discourse is in their interest. As Harvey points out, "place-based theories of nationalism, national socialism, and fascism have frequently been the epicentre for the most vicious assaults upon cosmopolitanism as well as liberalism. Possibly for this reason, liberals and

² HARVEY, D.: *Cosmopolitanism and the Geographies of Freedom*. Columbia University Press, New York 2009, p.282.

³ *Ibidem*, p.79.

⁴ RODRIK, D.: *The Globalization Paradox. Why Global Markets, States, and Democracy Can't Coexist*. Oxford University Press, Oxford 2012, p.59.

⁵ MOSCHONAS, G.: *In the Name of Social Democracy. The Great Transformation: 1945 to the Present*. Verso, London and New York 2002, p. 106-109.

cosmopolitans tend to ignore the problematics of place altogether or to write about it with undue caution. But that is no solution."⁶

In left-wing thinking, it would be good to realize realistically that the global socialist state is a long-term struggle. And do not forget that classical Marxism has always talked about internationalism (cooperation among peoples), not about cosmopolitanism (world-citizenship without national identity).

Working-class people in the world feel threatened by globalization. Liberalism does not understand them, there is much more communitarian instincts and irrationalism in them than the editors of *The Economist* can imagine. No *cost-benefit* analysis, no *homo economicus*.

Liberalism is a totally marginal attitude beyond Western Europe and the Anglo-Saxon countries; people all over the world understand themselves as a part of communities, cultural entities, nations, religions, tribes, families, shortly, of larger entities that make their life meaningful. Reducing them to *homo economicus* is the most awkward joke in chauvinistic Western culture.

Marx aptly depicted it when he criticized Jeremy Bentham and his utilitarian ideas: "With the driest naiveté he takes the modern shopkeeper, especially the English shopkeeper, as the normal man. Whatever is useful for this queer normal man, and to his world, is absolutely useful. This yard-measure, then, he applies to past, present and future."⁷

It is not just about Bentham. This is how the modern, Western individualism understands people in general: as utilitarian egoists. This is considered normal, and everything that goes beyond it, is savage, barbaric, and backward for the Western thinking. Western bourgeois individualism is completely alienated from the reality of a non-Western and non-metropolitan world, which it is harshly trying to adapt to its chauvinistic and ideological ideas instead of trying to understand it. The problem is not in the lack of individualism. The problem is that these people do not belong anywhere today because capitalism has broken their traditional way of livelihood, and liberalism breaks their fixed identity. They need to belong somewhere. If the Left does not try to acquire these people, fascists, whether European, American, or Islamic, are going to enchant them.

I have no more space for deeper argumentation, so I will just conclude my anti-globalist position in four main paragraphs which can be partly deduced from the previous arguments:

Firstly, I am an anti-globalist in that **I reject from the economic, ethical and political reasons the current neo-liberal version of globalization**, in which anonymous markets and multinational corporations dominate and thus weaken social states, democratic mechanisms and the sovereignty of people and nations; they radically increase social and regional inequalities; they increase the risks of economic, political and social crises; they contribute to ecological disasters and embrace the distinctive culture of different nations, indigenous groups, and the developing world. Global capitalism is maintained in the world only by the liberal ideologies, militarism and racism that all regions of the world throw into oppression, poverty and wars. This system cannot be reformed into the form of better hyper-globalization; it must be abandoned and replaced by an internationalist socialist alternative that would remove inequality, exploitation and arrogance of power.

Secondly, I am an anti-globalist because **I do not trust western universalist ideologies** that, for the sake of progress, modernization, human rights, or democracy, colonize the minds and practice of the world's most diverse regions to turn them into their image. It usually has only a purposeful geopolitical imperial background, but many times it is also the authentic chauvinism of western cultures that feel morally superior to the rest of the world. I reject this arrogance and, as an anti-globalist, I emphasize respect for other cultures, cultural partiality and polycentric cooperation between cultures and nations. I consider the socio-economic normative vision as more meaningful way to mobilize the left-wing movement and the cooperation of the nations; and how to lead a political fight for socialist alternatives: unifying economic visions, however, must retain respect for other cultures, stereotypes and historical trajectories to avoid the gigantism of classical western ideologies.

Thirdly, I am an anti-globalist in that I advocate, from the descriptive and prescriptive reasons, **collective identities** that could prevent neoliberal globalization, **including social classes or national states**. I reject liberal or postmodern simplifications which ignore the categories of the state or nation as an anachronism. It is clear on the descriptive level that states are particularly weakened today by

⁶ HARVEY, D.: *Cosmopolitanism and the Geographies of Freedom*. Columbia University Press, New York 2009, p.167

⁷ MARX, K.: *Capital*. Wordsworth Editions Limited, Ware 2013, p. 1105.

globalization, but de-globalization, the return of states or larger democratic regional entities to a sovereign control of the economy is to a certain extent possible. On a prescriptive level, I find it desirable to set up global co-operation in a way that states democratically control markets and not that transnational markets authoritatively control states. I do not refuse those forms of globalization that leave states decisive authority (e.g. the post-war Bretton Woods regime); but I am rejecting the current hyper-globalization, which devours national sovereignty, authentic democracy and social justice. I advocate – on behalf of the left-wing de-globalization strategies – the disconnection of national economies from the exclusive focus on export, deprivation of dependence on transnational markets, return to the local economy, introduction of capital controls, tax on financial transactions and the appropriate form of protectionism.

Fourthly, I am an anti-globalist, because unlike the alter-globalists, I do not believe that it is possible or desirable to create a cosmopolitan global state that would regulate the world economy. At this stage of history, I consider **alter-globalist denationalized visions to be dangerous because, due to the remote chimera of global governance, they are attacking the nation state as one of the few barriers that still prevent transnational capital to totally expand**. Transnational democracy is, to a large extent, a project that devours authentic popular participation, cultural and historical diversity, and ultimately can lead to imperialism or technocracy.

The global cosmopolitan state is an extraordinary naive and frustrating utopia in the world, in which still persist undeniable contradictions between the USA, Russia and China; Israel and Palestine; Iran and Saudi Arabia; North and South Korea, not to speak of neighbourly disputes across the world, not to excuse Europe. In such a quibble world, the vision of a global state is a lost way out. If we are looking for an alternative to global capitalism, I consider it more useful and realistic to concentrate on de-globalization alternatives, active regional co-operation, and only complementing use of a transnational factor in international co-operation. I offer internationalism (cooperation among nations), not cosmopolitanism (global cosmopolitanism without nation) as an alternative in accordance with the Marxist approach.

The idea of a united humanity, where we will create a solidarity community from a sense of belonging to the human species, and building on this we will create global institutions that will ensure a more equitable distribution of wealth and chances throughout the world – that is certainly tempting from a normative point of view. Yes, it sounds great, but unfortunately, the reality is different.

Dani Rodrik is right: democratic global governance, which is progressive, is an ordinary chimera. By devouring the nation-state globalization devours also the welfare state. And many social-liberal globalists, often by their naive cosmopolitan utopias, are only making useful idiots for supranational capital because they help to destroy the only thing that is still in its way – the national states, democratic governments, and solidarity communities.