

Globalization and R. Steiners Idea of a Threefold Social Organism

Eighty-Five Years Old, but Still Relevant: the “Threefold Formation of the Social Organism”, According to Rudolf Steiner

Rudolf Steiner’s “Threefold Formation of the Social Organism” (also known as the “Threefold Social Order”) is a conceptual instrument to analyse the world economy which has existed for 85 years, but which is still relatively little-known. (Some *attac*-activists adhere, either expressly or implicitly, to this approach). Here only certain aspects which are relevant for the process of globalization can be presented.

According to Steiner, a world economy has existed since about 1900. This world economy is a *closed system* which must be balanced within itself: that is, production and consumption must counterbalance each other. Through the continual increase in productivity, however, there has been a constant increase in production, which has not been matched by an equally great possibility of consumption.

Since 1900 the system has never been in balance: there has always been a supremely powerful producing entity which has kept another area of the world dependent in order to exploit it as a market. To begin with, this is how the European imperial powers treated their colonies (f.e. Great Britain and India); today, the industrialized Western world behaves like this toward the Third World.

“Globalization” has now greatly aggravated this state of affairs.

The balancing factor must be found *within the closed system*: a possibility must be found for the consumption of the commodities produced by the (essentially positive) extremely rapid increase in productivity.

The economy cannot create this possibility on its own; it must come from another area of society.

The “social organism”, according to Steiner, is maintained by three functions: a) “*economic life*”: the production, circulation and consumption of commodities; b) “*the life of the spirit*”: the development and implementation of every human individual’s talents and abilities; c) “*the life of law and justice*”: the regulation of the “purely (exclusively) human” relationships between persons. The ideal or aim of the first function is “fraternity”, or socialism; that of the second is “liberty”, and that of the third is “equality”, or democracy. The *healthy* social organism today must concede *independence* to each of these areas, similar to that of a sovereign state, so that the functions no longer corrupt each other as they do now in a centralized state. For the protection of the environment today, for example, we really need a body of legislation which is binding for all nations. National parliaments, which are heavily influenced by economic lobbyism, cannot be expected, however, to produce legislation with a tough enough character. An organization that carries out what people really think should be done, which does what an international “life of law and justice” *should* do, is, for example, Greenpeace (or also *attac*!). However, they are private organizations, “non-governmental organizations”, without formal legitimation! For this reason they cannot pass laws, but are reduced to lobbying for what they want. They are successful, because they truly express what most people’s sense of justice demands today.

There is one area of society that can form a real counterbalance, as a *pure consumer*, to the rampant, continually expanding sphere of production: that is the *life of the spirit*. This sphere has a purely consumptive character because it produces no commodities; however, it is far from being useless. On the contrary, *for the future* of the economy the life of the spirit is by far the most productive, or indeed the only productive sphere: it educates the next generation of workers, it is the source of all inventions and increases in productivity, etc., etc. The life of the spirit today, however, is extremely reduced, strangled, dominated by economic or state interests; it must be *liberated*, that means it must be sufficiently *funded* in order to be able to, first of all, be (spiritually!) more productive, and then also to be able to *consume* more. Once this has been understood, people will create new social structures which will make this possible. However, more taxes (by the state!) or more private donations will not be sufficient for the radical liberation which is necessary: the whole monetary system must be dynamized so as to include an element which will automatically accord the life of the spirit *as much* value - that is, buying power - as it has created for society's *future* economy. R. Steiner has made a concrete suggestion for such an element: it is what he calls "*gift money*", which is already present in today's economy, but which must be greatly expanded and dynamized in accordance with the above-mentioned social law.

A person who is "freed" from work in production need not become "unemployed"; the life of the spirit, which, once it is properly financed, will continually grow, can provide him with a useful occupation. The demand there is never satisfied!

When this purely consumptive social entity will have "tamed" the production explosion and counterbalanced it, the First World will no longer need to exploit the Third World and Eastern Europe by keeping them dependent and using them as a market outlet for their commodities. One will be able to allow Third World countries to develop their own economies at a simpler level, more suited to their lower standard of living, and to raise this standard while avoiding dependency on the industrialized economies (See for example *Small is Beautiful*, E.F. Schumacher, Abacus Books, London, 1974).

The rampant economic life must have its *limits* set by a strengthened life of law and justice, that is, by new laws in accordance with people's sense of justice. An example: all revenue arising from land ownership leads to value increases that are illusory, because by the mere ownership land is not improved - it just gets less! This capital is lacking to finance the productive life of the spirit. Therefore *private* ownership of land is wrong, it is socially *unhealthy*; only a *right* to use land, which is granted - for a limited time - by a publically accountable body, is appropriate. Unrestricted ownership of the means of production (stocks) also leads to illusory increases in value: every social structure which allows someone to draw an income without making an economically productive contribution is unjust and is perceived as such: it increases the malady of the social organism. (The exception are the needy: the ill, people of retirement age, children, etc.)

Real improvements through legislation, for example in these areas, can lead to a self-healing of economic life. The result would be a true, "humane" socialism, which, by safeguarding the sovereignty of the "life of the spirit", would avoid the mistake of doing violence to the individual in society.

The WTO is an institution which has created a world-wide body of economic law, but on the basis of an unjust economic system, which one-sidedly allows and encourages maximum private profits at the expense of public interests. If we tear out this unjust system of economic

law at the roots, for example in the areas mentioned above, we will be able to create a new economic structure which, in a humane way, will be able to regulate itself, without the necessity of manipulatory state restrictions.

From the standpoint of the “Threefold Social Order”, the social organism is healthy if the three systems, “economic life”, “life of the spirit” and “life of law and justice” are in balance, with none dominating the others; in the same way the system of “checks and balances” divides and thereby controls power in the American government.

There is a correspondence to this relationship in the human organism: it is the balance between the “system of nerves and perception”, the “system of metabolism and limbs”, and the “system of breathing and blood circulation” (these are R. Steiner’s terms), which maintains the health of the whole organism and keeps it functioning.

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