

On Neoliberalism

Neoliberalism as a doctrine further questioned and contested (A response to Jennifer Sterling-Folker)

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Abstract

In this paper we will argue that the supposed (politico-economic and governmental) qualities of neoliberalism, as it occurs, are debatable and cannot hold out in the way protagonists put their arguments forward. Many underlying assumptions on which the main arguments - such as numerous unilateral claims on the transformation-benefits of the welfare state - are based, demonstrate conflicting and counterproductive results and need therefore to be criticized.

This paper summarizes a few key-positions that can be taken towards these claims. A full research-report is presented in our three volume work *Drifting citizens (Burgers op drift. De staat van vertwijfeling. Pathologie van een gedesoriënteerde samenleving*. ISSR, Blacklabel Publishing, 2020; forthcoming in English).

We will outline some of the central claims involved. Subsequently these claims are compared with socio-economical and institutional realities that occur as a result of executed neoliberal policy. We will conclude with a few remarks on real progress in a humanitarian way. Policy and polity-change in the Netherlands under neoliberal governments during the last forty years is taken as an example to underline our position.

Keywords:

neoliberalism, corporatism, market-capitalism, institutional and polity-change, progress, modernity, civic rights and citizenship, welfare state, political economy and philosophy

1. Outline

According to the opening statement in *International Relations Theories* (Dunne, Kurki and Smith 2013) ¹ *theoretical diversity* is to be valued. However, in our view, an unbiased critical and also sound moral position towards mainstream-theories that support a problematic status quo can rightfully be taken and defended. For instance positions based on, and in accordance with (universal) human rights that urge states and governments to carry out balanced socio-economic policies in which social security for all citizens is (institutionally) protected and maintained.

Especially when diversity is obscured by ideologies that falsely claim to be progressive in this way, such counterpositions are essential and indispensable for a clear understanding of societies (Van der Kooij 2021) ²

In chapter six of the forementioned work political scientist Jennifer Sterling-Folker presents a series of statements on neoliberalism that are highly questionable. The essence of this outline comes to a presentation of this ideology as being chiefly concerned with *international cooperation and institutional maintenance*.

In her final statement it is put that '*neoliberalism's strength lies in its ability to highlight the sheer ubiquity of institutions and cooperative efforts in the current system*' [and that] '*in doing so it underscores how the ability to achieve collective action solutions has significantly increased in global affairs.*'

Also: '*it is undoubtedly the case that contemporary global affairs exhibit more cooperative dynamics than at any other time in the Westphalian system*'. ³

Although sovereignty surely has hampered internationalism – and still does apparently – , it certainly is not due to neoliberalism that progress (albeit laboriously) is made in this respect. This appears to be not only a heavily biased and blurred but also a false set of statements, as it repudiates the essential importance of major institutional progress which was carefully implemented with the construction of West-European welfare states. A construction-process however which has been *broken off* — in stead of 'adjusted' (so the euphemistic connotation is spread widely) — in many ways by neoliberal policies during the past decades. Especially in the UK, the Netherlands and Germany.

¹ Dunne, T., Kurki, M. and Smith, S. (eds.) *International Relations Theories. Discipline and diversity* (third ed.) Oxford University Press, 2013: vi

² As outlined in Van der Kooij, Henri (Eric) J.H. *More of the same, or true pluralism? On disambiguation of monolithic 'double-Dutch treats'. Towards an ideological turn of scientific and policy approaches of social issues*, ISSR, feb. 2021

³ Sterling-Folker, J. in: *International Relations* (ibid.) Ch. 6, Neoliberalism, 114-131, pp. 129-130

Although several attempts have been made to define the notion of neoliberalism, for example as a 'thought collective' (Mirowski & Plehwe 2009), or '*a loose set of ideas of how the relationship between the state and its external environment ought to be organised*' [meaning] '*a loosely demarcated set of political beliefs which most prominently and prototypically include the conviction that the only legitimate purpose of the state is to safeguard individual, especially commercial, liberty, as well as strong private property rights*' (Thorsen & Lie 2006) ⁴, there is however no clear scientific nor political consensus about a congruent definition that encompasses the multilayered complexity of this ideology. In the revised edition of the paper by Thorsen & Lie this last addition is formulated as follows:

...to safeguard individual liberty, understood as a sort of mercantile liberty for individuals and corporations.'

They conclude: '*This conviction usually issues, in turn, in a belief that the state ought to be minimal or at least drastically reduced in strength and size, and that any transgression by the state beyond its sole legitimate purpose is unacceptable.*' ⁵

Although it obvious that there have been attempts to clarify and position diverging liberal as well as conservative elements, this final conclusion is unsatisfactory as such claims do not counterbalance the severe impact of a *loss of essential functions of state and government* which we will address further in this paper. Especially where it is believed and stated that neoliberalism is *not* to be understood as a complete political philosophy or ideology and that therefore it would *not be a matter of the way political processes ought to be organised* [sic]. ⁶ This gross aberration needs to be clarified and adjusted, as neoliberal politics have proven that it is false to presume that transformation and austerity-policies have occurred completely out of the blue. Justifications of these policies have been based for a long time on neoliberal assumptions and corresponding polity-thought in general, as longitudinal research of this transformation-process in the Netherlands reveals (Van der Kooij 2020) ⁷

Therefore we suggest the following definition in order to clarify our position in this widely spread entanglement:

⁴ Thorsen & Lie, *What is neoliberalism?* 2006: 14-15, referring to Mises (1962), Nozick (1974) and Hayek (1979)

⁵ (Ibid. revised version) in: *Contemporary Readings in Law and Social Justice*, vol. 2(2), 2010: 188-214

See also Thorsen, D. *The politics of Freedom*, Oslo 2011) (PhD thesis)

⁶ Thorsen & Lie 2006, ibid. p.15

⁷ Van der Kooij, E. *Burgers op drift* [Drifting Citizens] *De Staat van vertwijfeling. Pathologie van een gedesoriënteerde samenleving*. Vol. 1-3, ISSR, Blacklabel Publishing 2020 (forthcoming in English)

Neoliberalism encompasses a combination of economic-liberal en conservative ideological elements, in which a dominant set of marketmechanisms is supposed to present the *determining normative conditions* to embed social-economic en administrative governmental policy and *the pursuit to balance state en market-domains is discharged* in favour of the market.

As a political-economic doctrine neoliberalism thus encompasses an *economic* model as well as a model of *governmental management* and *changes* the equilibrium that has been pursued with the construction and foundation of the 'welfare state' (rather: social security-state) within mixed economies. This polity change towards this equilibrium appears merely at the cost of public services (Mazzucato 2011). According to Bourdieu (1998) this doctrine comprehends '*a programme for destroying collective structures that may impede the pure market logic.*' This ideology is therefore in Bourdieu's view by definition (cynically) *destructive*.⁸ Also: '*the neoliberal programme draws its social power from the political and economic power of those whose interests it expresses: stockholders, financial operators, industrialists, conservative or social-democratic politicians who have been converted to the reassuring layoffs of laissez-faire (...)*'⁹ In paradoxal contrast to adhered market-concepts many involved governmental officials don't have to be afraid of personal risks that possibly arise as a consequence from their actions, as after all they mostly operate with public financial resources and can conceal themselves behind democratic legislation and procedural proceedings. A *second* paradox occurs however with the mingling of (neo)liberal and communal civil society-concepts, as the *position of the individual* hereby may seem to be interpreted in rather diverging ways. On the one hand citizens are seen as more or less 'autonomous' individuals who have to try, or rather are able, to serve their personal interests by employing *supposed* facilities and possibilities ('capabilities') as optimally as possible, such as emphasized in neoliberal-merito-cratic views and concepts. On the other hand the individual is seen as a socially embedded citizen with linked social 'responsibilities and obligations', which is stressed by community and civil

⁸ Bourdieu, P. *Contre-feux: Propos pour servir à la résistance contre l'invasion néolibérale*. Paris: Éditions Liber 1998

⁹ 'L'essence du néolibéralisme'. *Le Monde diplomatique*, Mars 1998 (monde-diplomatique.fr/1998/03/bourdieu/10167)

society-protaganists such as Walzer, Dewey, MacIntyre, Taylor, Etzioni, Putnam a.o. (cf Morrice 1996) ¹⁰

Such claims are based upon hardly any realistic, but illusive viewpoints concerning a just and effective *institutional organisation* of state and society and the required *functional obligations of the state* in order to effectuate lawful entitlements of all citizens, while at the same time a unilateral focus on individual citizen's 'duties' and 'capabilities' to manage their interests in a rigid market-economy is falsely advocated (see following section). Citizens have basically one duty: to respect the democratic constitutional law and to pay their (fair share of) taxes. All the rest is less relevant than it is pretended. 'Community-building' primarily requires *institutional coherence*, no moralistic propaganda that continues a status quo which harms and obstructs citizen's needs and societal progress.

2. *Everyone to himself and the market for all?*

We will continue to consider some of the key-claims of neoliberal ideological thought. As stated in our outline the claims involved encompass economic policy as well as state-organisation and governmental management that have a considerable impact on citizen's positions and rights. The fundamental question is whether or not societies and citizens really benefit in the way it is advocated. To answer this question it is necessary to view the *practical consequences and effects* of neoliberal policy, and not to leave this issue to theorists alone.

i. In general – *The anti-etatistic and oligopolistic pathway*

'Free markets will set free the creative potential and entrepreneurial spirit', as advocates of market capitalism such as Hayek (1973) and Rothbard ([1962/1970] 2004) have emphasized systematically, while referring to a so called 'spontaneous [i.e. an 'organic'] order of societies that leads to individual liberty and well-being'. ¹¹ This classical liberal vision of how societies function *economically* is however accompanied by neoliberals and civil society-adepts alike, with further claims concerning the 'disadvantages' of *distributional state-intervention* and the supposed adverse consequences for 'rightful' *citizenship* in

¹⁰ Morrice, D. *Philosophy, Science and Ideology in Political Thought*, Palgrave MacMillan, 1996: 169 et sec. See also: Foley, M. and Edwards, B. The paradox of civil society, *Journal of democracy* 7 (3), pp. 38-52, 1996

¹¹ Thorsen & Lie 2006 (ibid.)

general. Many of these lines of thought are to be found in the basic concepts of *New Public Management* as promoted by Osborne & Gaebler (1992).¹²

When promoting minimal state-functions and a minimal welfare state, whereas social security-conditions are mainly left to private and civil parties (such as commercial insurance-companies and privatised organisations), citizens are left to the (greedy) hands of proliferated *entrepreneurs* who will primarily be focused on *equity-outputs*. Efficiency, '*customer-fit*' and reduction of costs-arguments therefore turn out to be non-realistic. Also a supposed reduction of bureaucratic 'red tape' will not be realised, for an increasing amount of procedural rules and regulations appears to be needed in order to safeguard such equity-goals. For a while market-competition may lead to lower prices for customers at first (sight), but will finally result in *oligopolistic concentration of financial and economic power*. Increases of civil tax-payments will be needed as big(ger) – mainly foreign – companies are often partially or fully excluded from tax-duties (such as in the Netherlands as a tax haven). A shift of public expenditure to individual citizens and households to compensate for lacking governmental assets has, at it shows, severe consequences for the costs of living and living-standards in general. Especially for the lesser paid.

ii. State provisions and services: *commodities and merit-goods*

Besides basic economic-liberal notions on commercial entrepreneurial freedom within markets, liberal ideologies also hold views on how distribution and allocation of commodities and *merit goods* should be organised. Distribution of services and redistribution of income within institutionalised welfare state-provisions and arrangements are mainly seen as 'counterproductive' and (too) costly (i.e. 'luxurious' and therefore practically superfluous). These arrangements were considered to be too vulnerable for 'freeriding and freeloading'. Therefore the welfare state (social security-state) is contested and rejected as advocated with New Public Management (see *i*). The welfare state (if constructed as a social security-state according to Western European – especially *continental* models – that is) had to be transformed preferably into an 'insurance-state'. (Notably, for antagonists such welfare states were supposed to have enough '*adaptive capability*' [sic] to provide for such desired and supported change)(Hemerijck 2013 a.o.). Therefore the concept of a so called 'participation-society' in which corporatistic elements of civil

¹² See Van der Kooij 2020 and 2021 (Ibid.)

'selfreliance' are incorporated, has been advised strongly by policymakers over the years to *replace* the former social security-model. As a result the fragmentation and dismantlement of public services was taken up rigorously with extensive *privatisation* of the (institutionalised) public domain. Market-domination is seen as the *optimal* way to provide for 'efficient' welfare and social security-arrangements and to see to an effective way of allocating goods and services for the general interest of citizens and their society.

This appears to be founded mainly on unsupported assumptions and expectations (wishful thinking) that are refuted by practical developments and outcomes. In other words these notions have been proven for the greater part to be based on merely false arguments without analyses *ex ante* as stated in various national and international surveys. (Dutch State Council 2009/2010 and Dutch Auditor General 1995/1998. See also Nachtwey 2016; Streeck 2013; Castel 2009/2016, 2011, 2013).

iii. Citizenship

On top of these regressive institutional and social-economic consequences, the way *citizenship* is perceived in neoliberal thought may be even more disturbing when viewed to the full. As Thorsen & Lie write: '*Neoliberalism could also include a **perspective on moral virtue**: the good and virtuous person is one who is able to access the relevant markets and function as a competent actor in these markets. He or she is willing to accept the risks associated with participating in free markets, and to adapt to rapid changes arising from such participation (Friedman 1980). Individuals are also seen as being **solely responsible** for the consequences of the choices and decisions they freely make: instances of **inequality** and glaring **social injustice** are morally acceptable, at least to the degree in which they could be seen as the result of freely made decisions (Nozick 1974; Hayek 1976). If a person demands that the state should regulate the market or make reparations to the unfortunate who has been caught at the losing end of a freely initiated market transaction, this is viewed as an indication that the person in question is **morally depraved** and **underdeveloped**, and scarcely different from a proponent of a totalitarian state (Von Mises 1962).*' [Emph. vdK] ¹³

This recap of reactionary notions to which Thorsen & Lie rightfully refer, calls for a profound positioning and addressing of criticism, for citizens in constitutional democratic states don't have to 'prove' to anyone that they 'participate' in a supposed 'right way', as

¹³ Thorsen & Lie, 2006: 15

they *constitutionally belong* to society in the first place. Secondly, according to the constitution citizens may (formally) have 'equal' opportunities, this does not mean they have an *equal position in materializing such 'opportunities'*. Life chances are not only connected with willingness, but foremost with *facilities and provisions* they do or don't have at their disposal in a sufficient way. To assume that 'by definition' citizens are 'autonomous' in this respect is false. It neglects fundamental issues of *inequality and the obligations* states and governments have in this respect. Or as Stiglitz has put it pithily: 'inequality is a choice; equality of opportunity our [American] national myth.'¹⁴ To be able to understand the full impact of this, we willingly memorize Stiglitz' clarification as outlined in the foreword of Polanyi's early prominent work *The Great Transformation* ([1944] 2001):

'Rapid transformation destroys old coping mechanisms, old safety nets, while it creates a new set of demands, before new coping mechanisms are developed. This lesson from the nineteenth century has, unfortunately, all too often been forgotten by the advocates of the Washington consensus, the modern-day version of the liberal orthodoxy.' (Ibid. Foreword, vii-viii; x-xii).

'The advocates of the neoliberal Washington consensus emphasize that it is government interventions that are the source of the problem; the key to transformation is "getting prices right" and getting the government out of the economy through privatization and liberalization. In this view, development is little more than the accumulation of capital and improvements in the efficiency with which resources are allocated—purely technical matters. This ideology misunderstands the nature of the transformation itself—a transformation of society, not just of the economy, and a transformation of the economy that is far more profound than their simple prescriptions would suggest. Their perspective represents a misreading of history, as Polanyi effectively argues.' (Ibid. xiv) [Emph. vdK]

This historic aberration of perceptions towards economic 'progress' to which Polanyi and Stiglitz refer is also addressed by Krugman where he states:

'The history of economic thought in the twentieth century is a bit like the history of Christianity in the sixteenth century. ... Economic theory at least aspires to be science, not theology; it is concerned with earth, not heaven. Keynesian theory initially prevailed because it did a far better job than classical orthodoxy of making sense of the world around us. ... Friedman's laissez-faire absolutism contributed to an intellectual climate in which faith in markets and disdain for government often trumps the evidence.' [Emph. vdK]¹⁵

¹⁴ J. Stiglitz, *The New York Times*, Feb. 16 feb. and Oct. 13, 2013

¹⁵ P. Krugman, *Who was Milton Friedman?* The New York Review of Books, 5 feb. 2007

Much is left by neoliberals to rather illusive belief. Therefore presumed outcomes remain largely unattained by the policy-means en mechanisms they advocate. However the impact of this (economic and *polity*) debate reaches further than merely philosophical theorizing is able to encounter. *Social consequences* of these economical premises appear to be humiliating for citizens and have *disintegrating effects* on society as a whole. The rather absolutistic connotations of this doctrine can hardly be underestimated as dogmatic beliefs seriously hamper open-mindedness. The closing-in upon open pluralistic and non-dogmatic deliberation is a grave major consequence for all involved. This nailing up does not point to 'consensus' — let alone to justification of the 'theories' involved — , but mainly to insecurity towards positions taken and a rather reluctant attitude towards profound criticism.

The development of neoliberalism as an ideology and doctrine can be conceptualised as follows (see fig. A)

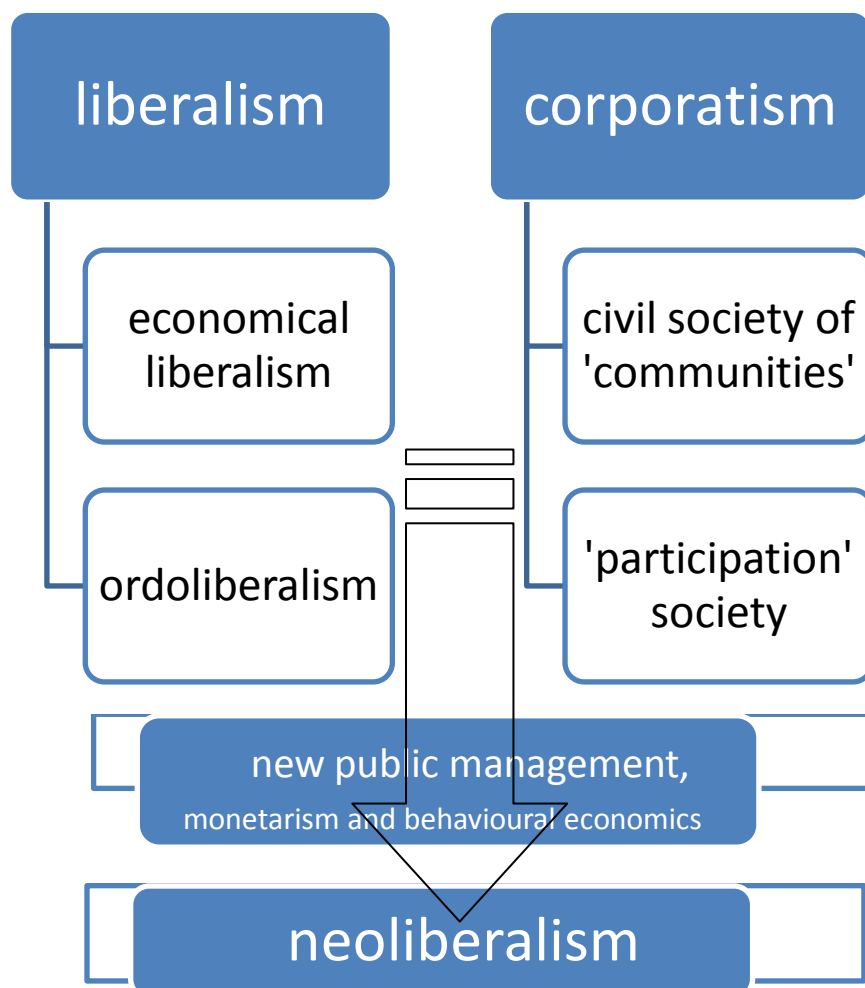


Fig. A The historical merging of successive models of liberalism and corporatism that resulted in New Public Management and the dominant model of neoliberalism (→ contnd.)

Explanation of fig. A

The original concept of (political) **liberalism** positioned citizens (as *citoyens*) as sole *holders of political sovereignty* and contested the models of feudal hierarchy and absolutism. Later on, this classical liberalism was shaded by *market-economic* notions about the (desired) order of societies, in which state and government had to play a minor role in order to give way to entrepreneurial and industrial developments, as in earlier (pre-industrial) times during the era of mercantilism. With 20th century '*ordo*'-liberalism (of the *Austrian* and subsequently *Chicago-school*) this central idea was pushed even more further and seen as a *panacea* for almost every 'malady and evil' in society (Mises, Hayek, Friedman). '*Pursuit of happiness*' would be generated by rigid market-concepts only ('roll back the State'). Later on these views were incorporated in *New Public Management* in which the state is mainly seen as a burden and an evil for 'real progress'.

The central idea of **corporatism** in which an '*organic*' view towards society is supported, is very much attached to Christian and feudal notions about relations between rulers and subjects. The keyword is cooperation (i.e. *concerted action*) to which all subjects are supposed to be inclined and/or submitted. It represents foremost a harmonious model in which contrastive and conflicting interests are seen of minor consequence, as the willingness to cooperate is supposed to bind subjects together. State-functions are seen as 'additional' at the most (as in economic and ordoliberalism). In this view 'communities' are the heart of society and civilian 'participation' (i.e. participation within the labour-market) is seen as the key to progress and (individual) 'success' (emancipation).

With the rise of *New Public Management*, as well as *monetarism* and *behavioural economics* the models *merge* towards the dominant ideology of **neoliberalism**. *Anti-etatism* and an overall *market-oriented perception* in which citizens primarily are seen as 'autonomous' consumers and clients binds the two together.

3. Rhetorical and factual progress

When viewing practical social consequences more closely, extensive research of Wilkinson and Piketty can hardly be disregarded. As their international surveys, together with our own analysis of the transformation of the Dutch welfare state have shown, many neoliberal claims have been thoroughly refuted. Instead of claimed 'progress' – meaning more upward social mobility, lesser (income) inequality and more balanced *living conditions* (social security and wellbeing) for all – there is increasing *inequality and insecurity, polarisation and segregation* ('we' versus 'the others'), overall *regression* (*Abstieg*, *Nachtwey*) and *deprivation* among broad sections of the population. This appears not only to be the case in the United States (as one of the many countries that never have fully initialized a institutional social security-system), but in many other OECD-countries as well. Therefore national economic 'prosperity' is not identical to overall *wellbeing* that guarantees citizen's *quality of life*, and does not generate

such 'by definition'. A combination of individualism and rather noncommittal 'community spirit' is therefore highly problematic. Especially where there is a similarity between both orientations concerning a tough *anti-etatism* that harms proper and well-understood interest-solidarity on which the institutional foundations of (Western European) welfare states were grounded.

Although Rorty poses that the *communitarian* (Walzerian) image of the advocated (corporatistic) model of society demonstrates a strong connection with liberal notions towards the relation between citizen and state/government, it can be questioned whether post-modernistic concepts that underlie such anti-etatistic views are the right answer to solve the forementioned problematic questions. Albeit Nietzschean inspired deconstructivistic post-modernists (such as Lyotard, Foucault, Derrida, Sloterdijk, and Rorty himself) acknowledge -more or less- that overall fragmentation may arise because of a (supposed) necessity to question political-philosophical conceptions as well as historical developments as such (relativism), this acknowledgement resembles according to Habermas predominantly a *conservative rejection of an enlightened-humanistic tradition of ideas*, as too little a stand is taken on a critical-constructive attitude *against* such fragmentation. According to Habermas (1992) their ideas lack for the greater part 'ratio' and 'direction'. Also:

[Foucault's theory of] '*genealogy is overtaken by a fate similar to that which Foucault had seen in the human sciences: To the extent that it retreats into the reflectionless objectivity of a nonparticipatory, ascetic description of kaleidoscopically changing practices of power, genealogical historiography emerges from its cocoon as precisely the presentistic, relativistic, cryptonormative illusory science that it does not want to be.*' (Habermas 1994)

Notwithstanding the observation that neoliberalism greatly depends on *deconstructivism* which favours 'a panopticum of ideas and narratives', ongoing fragmentation and disorientated views on the real necessities in life hamper solid approaches by which actual and fundamental problems of societies can be tackled effectively. Our main objection against the way neoliberalism is presented however, is related to the assumption that neoliberalism would be primarily concerned with (international) 'cooperation' as Sterling-Folker argues. Although such cooperation may be advocated, neoliberalism – as likewise in economic liberalism – predominantly focusses on *competition* within a (so called) free market, but at the same time appears to have a strong alliance with (neo)nationalism and is therefore foremost *anti-internationalistic*. (Global) interdependence is not challenged in a realistic, but in a rather 'narrow'(-minded) way (Plehwe 2006). As neoliberalism has adopted the ideological concepts

of new public management which are based on economic liberal and corporatistic civil society concepts, it not only opposes etatism but also favours 'do it yourself' policies for communities that do not benefit citizen's rights, but marginalises them. Neoliberalism *opposes the welfare state* and focusses on so called 'innovation' and (individual) 'empowerment' ('autonomy') in order to cope with societal matters of injustice and inequality. It relies strongly on *behavioural economics* in which power mechanisms of the politico-economic *macro-domain* is subdued in favour of the *micro-sphere* and in which individual citizens are supposed to have sufficient facilities to act 'efficiently' to their interests (as long this acting is 'rational'). Without balanced *social-economic policy* this appears to be of little meaning and a hoax, for citizens are to be rightfully protected against oppressing mechanisms of massproduction and – consumption that hamper those interests. At least that was the key to realistic *progressiveness* as pursued with the institutionalised welfare state.

4. Conclusion

Neoliberalism as it is presented in surveys like those of Sterling-Folker, is mainly supposed to encompass a set of thoughts that *advances* modern society. This remains rather questionable as its central *notions* as well as its *outcomes* are not as unilateral as it is presented. Such a limited focus creates and maintains incomprehension in which citizen's rights tend to disappear, for the *quality of life* (cf Dahrendorf's *life chances*) is mainly and foremost left to market-economic strategies that lay beyond reach of individuals as economic actors, which subsequently hardly can be influenced by them. Real progress means *to the benefit of all*, instead of exploitation of the masses that selectively benefits the few.¹⁶

Because of the specified convergence of (economic) liberalism with corporatism and deconstructivism, the ideology of anti-modernistic and neoconservative neoliberalism appears to be a (cynical and perverse) *threat to institutionalised social security and pluralism, as well as to (cooperative) progress in general* (Rothstein 1998). It behaves as a indebatable *doctrine*, while based on *questionable assumptions* of progress and life chances. Moreover neoliberalism (as well as economic liberalism) is not primarily concerned with (international) 'cooperation', but focusses on *competition* within a national and global market *that is supposed to be 'free'*, but is actually not.

¹⁶ See Chomsky, N. *Profit over People – Neoliberalism and Global Order* (1999)

In short, regarding the effects and outcomes, it has been examined that in various countries that have embraced neoliberalism and where governments have implemented neoliberal policy

- institutionalised social security is dismantled (as far as welfare states are concerned)
- income inequality and unsettling market-dependency of citizens has risen
- citizen's rights are being neglected and/or violated
- public institutions have been fragmented (healthcare; labourmarket)
- the social contract between citizens and their state/government has become disordered
- the marketeconomy dominates human values in a rather human-hostile way.

The neoliberal model of society has proven to be bankrupt and a failure, and has become fully obsolete. Therefore we reject Sterling-Folkers' final statement that 'neoliberalism's strength lies in *its ability to highlight the sheer ubiquity of institutions and cooperative efforts in the current system*' and that 'in doing so it underscores how *the ability to achieve collective action solutions has significantly increased* in global affairs.' [sic] [italics vdK] ¹⁷ This seems rather controversial (to say the least), as we have surveyed the international labourmarket and social security systems thoroughly. The fragmentation of workersrights due to goals of marketcompetition is not a characteristic symptom of progress, but of *decline*. International competition leads to piling up of oligopolistic economic power.

In sheer contradiction with the closed ideology of neoliberalism itself, neoliberal arrogance shows no limits. 'We are the champions' – but champions of *what*? This ideologic complacency and euphoria is completely unwarranted (as it was earlier during the mid-fifties, when welfare states still had to be constructed and most industrialized countries did *not* adopt a Western European welfare model). ¹⁸ Neoliberal framing of 'happiness', 'authenticity' and 'success' appears superficial and regressive. It refers to and echoes 19th century views on (industrial) progress in which market-dominance was advocated, but which has led towards severe polarisation of entire societies (and their citizens). This also as a result of greedy and unlimited shareholders-capitalism which

¹⁷ Sterling-Folker, Neoliberalism, ibid. p.130

¹⁸ See the arguments that were put forward on the Milan-conference *The future of freedom* of 1955, by which it was *supposed* that markets could look after themselves best without governmental interference. Welfare would spread automatically. After all 'communism' had proven to be a losing ideology, so it was assumed. (See Raymond Aron, *Nations and ideologies*, in: *The future of freedom*, Papers from the International Conference on the future on Freedom convened by the Congress for Cultural Freedom in Milan, 1955. Sociologist and political philosopher Aron, being a liberal Atlantic protagonist, was one of the main organizers of this conference. See also Aron's *The End of Ideology and the Renaissance of Ideas*, in: *The Industrial Society. Three Essays on Ideology and Development*. London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1967) [1966]

accompanies the advocated ideology freely. The same mechanisms still threaten modern societies for which cannot be warned enough (if policy-makers decide to go forward on the same basis).

Considering all this, Sterling-Folker's surveying summary of neoliberalism is not only incomplete, but essentially inadequate. It ignores the *widespread severe impact* this ideology has on citizens and their society. At the most this impact is presented as a part of (some) 'criticism' that is put forward by antagonists. However in general the presented view holds an overall willingness to accept 'the logic' of the arguments by which neoliberal ideology is legitimized. In this respect it is not only disconcerted having to record to what degree the many cling to such defective and contraproductive ideas, but also rather disturbing to note that mainstream social science (in general) has been carried away by this doctrine, by which it has rather willingly adopted the underlying dogmatics. In many mainstream surveys fundamental criticism and refutation of assumptions is met with reluctance, or is just bluntly ignored. In addition, neoliberal dominance in politics and governance is linked to a significant Anglo-Saxon dominance in research policy in which presented ideological theories often appear rather unilateral biased. This can hardly be understood as a sound recommendation for truly open minded science in general. It is time human dignity and citizen's rights are respected to the full. Especially when so many remain deprived of adequate living conditions. Not only in OECD-countries (being 'welfare states' or not), but even more in the global market-economy worldwide. Times of 'ordo-liberalism'-derivates are over, as such models evidently cannot provide for progress in a real humanitarian way. This isn't the 'order' that people need, nor want. An solid *international order of rights* requires foremost a rightful understanding of what is needed to end exploitation, division and financial greedyness, as Dutch econom(etr)ist and Nobelprize-laureate Tinbergen already strongly advised during the postwar era. Neoliberalism offers no perspective to this end.

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