

Beyond Growth?! **Congress, May 20th. - 22nd. 2011,** **Technische Universität Berlin**

The belief that economic growth can increase prosperity and solve social problems has dominated the thinking and policy-making of various social systems to this day - be they of Keynesian, neo-liberal or socialist stamp. However, the promises of the proponents of growth have not been fulfilled in many ways; often they have brought just the opposite: continuing mass unemployment, redistribution of wealth from the bottom to the top and the spreading of the gap between rich and poor in all countries, as well as globally. In addition to the limits to growth, which have been described often, regional and global catastrophes of ecological nature are also occurring. Most recently, the rampant dynamics of growth has detonated in a global financial and economic crisis. Yet economic growth continues to be vaunted as the universal remedy for all of these crisis-laden phenomena.

The intensification of climate disorder, loss of biological diversity and other degradation of the ecosystem affects first and foremost impoverished populations, above all those in the countries of the South. Globally, one billion people are starving. Hundreds of thousands have had to flee because of global warming, and wars are being waged for the sake of securing resources. In global perspective, the fossil basis of capitalism will soon reach its limits, for raw materials such as oil, natural gas and phosphorus are limited.

Therefore, it is vitally important to examine new economic concepts, and conduct a discussion about alternatives to the growth-society!

There has been discussion about the ecological, economic and social limits to growth for several decades. Yet now there is a new dynamics to the examination of the dominant growth paradigm. Some plead for a kind of sustainable and/or social growth. They assume that a certain amount of economic growth is necessary in order to solve social and ecological problems. Thus, a combination of ecological conversion and public investment, higher wages, new jobs and an extension of social security would be sufficient to solve the environmental crisis and create more justice.

Other people consider these measures necessary but not sufficient. They call for an end to growth or a reduction of the economy. They assume that a sustainable form of economic growth is not possible because any gains in efficiency are negated by growth and any growth will make the social and ecological crises worse. Consequently, they call for a fundamental transformation to an economy based on solidarity and a society without growth.

The congress Beyond Growth?!, to be held from May 20th-22nd, 2011 in Berlin is intended to provide an opportunity for discussing these diverse positions in a controversial and constructive manner. The conflicting interests will be identified and paths leading toward a good life for everyone in a society divested of the growth-compulsion will be explored and strategies sketched out.

The following questions - among others - will be discussed at the congress:

- What are the driving forces behind economic growth? Can a capitalist economy survive without growth?
- Can the economy continue to grow despite the ecological and social limits to growth? And is growth desirable independent of this? What potential and limits are inherent in concepts of sustainable growth?
- What opportunities for development are there for countries in the South, if opportunities

- for growth are transferred from the North to the South? Is growth in the South the right path or are there other development paths?
- How do we want to work in the future and what is the role of shortened working-hours? How can social security be organised beyond growth?
 - What are the consequences of a growth or a post-growth economy for the just distribution of wealth, especially in the North-South context?
 - How can economic activity be managed "beyond growth"? How can the finance markets be disarmed, what is the importance of money and what role does a solidarity-based economy play? What shape does a socio-ecological conversion of industries take on, what is the significance of the services sector in a socio-ecological conversion and what forms of economic democracy are conceivable?
 - Under what conditions could a gender-just economy contribute to satisfying growth?
 - Is the "good life" (only) possible with or (only) without growth?

The congress consists of two parts: In the first part, Analysis and Criticism, the individual and structural driving forces and problems of the current growth-economy, its ecological and social limits, as well as the crisis of the work-oriented society will be analysed. In the second part, the Alternatives and Strategies for a society beyond growth will be discussed, and themes such as solidarity-based economics, global justice, solutions for the work-oriented society and the good life in a limited world will be in the foreground.

A congress by Attac

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