

8. Berliner Colloquium zur Zeitgeschichte

The Return of Political Economy in Contemporary History

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Conference Language: German

28 and 29 September 2012

Questionnaire

Session 1 Term, Subject, History:

Political Economy—What Was It, What Is It?

Introduction Philip Manow

Chair Tim B. Müller

* How and when did the term come into usage and what changes have taken place with respect to its meaning since then?

* Did the differentiation of those disciplines dealing with political economy primarily lead to a variety of incompatible terms or concepts or are there certain areas of convergence?

* What area(s) of research interest inform the term? How great are national differences in this respect?

* How do politics and economics intersect and how can this intersection be articulated in conceptual terms—and how can this nexus of problems be investigated, what analytic strategies are (were) on offer? Is a general cross-disciplinary convergence with problems of political economy once again conceivable, and what would such forms of discussion, cooperation and the division of labor look like?

Session 2 The Role of Political Economy

in Twentieth-Century Social History

Introduction Jan-Otmar Hesse

Chair Bernd Greiner

* Was there ever such a thing as »historical political economy,« if not by that name then at least with respect to its content? What was its program?

- * To what extent and effectiveness was (and is) social history a history of political economies? How successful has the economic dimension of historical social studies been?
- * Put more concretely, what have political-economy approaches contributed to our understanding of the larger themes of contemporary history—the First and Second World War, the stabilization and dissolution of the Weimar Republic, National Socialism, Fascism, the democratic welfare state, the New Deal, the Cold War, German postwar society, European integration, the transformations since the 1970s? What can these approaches succeed in doing that other historical perspectives can't?
- * What central concepts served as the leading edge of research? For instance are there describable trends in the use of certain class or capitalism concepts, and if so then what precisely are these concepts? How dominant have such approaches become and to what extent have they been able to impact disciplinary training?
- * Can the project of a historical political economy be interpreted as an intellectual product or phenomenon of the liberal-democratic welfare states and those societies experiencing rapid growth after the Second World War?
- * What was the role played here by national differences, international convergences and transnational processes of exchange—at both the scholarly/scientific level as well as from a social perspective?

Session 3 After the Boom: The Return of Political Economy?

Introduction Peter Fritzsche

Chair Stefanie van de Kerkhof

- * Is it true that in the last two decades there has been at least a temporary dip in the significance assigned to political-economy approaches to the »general« history of the twentieth century? And conversely, in the past several years, is there an increasing interest in these problems?
- * Are the reasons for the temporary loss due to dynamics specific to the field, for instance the cultural-historical countermovement? To what degree are the political and social needs and mental states connected to this development; i.e. dissolution of the normative consensus of postwar society, the end of the Cold War, dynamics of greater individualism, but also less economic stability and hopes for economic advancement? What is the role played by non-disciplinary theoretical impulses, for instance »postmodern« ones, on those available theories aimed at symbolizations, performances, constructions and communication?

- * And how, from an analytic perspective, do we take into account the cultural mediation of political and economic phenomena? In terms of just such an »integrative« political-economic approach, what is the role played by new individual expectations and social entitlements, changed conceptions of justice, more pluralistic lifestyles, and the demographic transformation of societies through multi-ethnicity among other phenomena?
- * To what degree can historians who wish to place economic problems at the center of their analysis but who have no desire to do »pure« economic history avoid the demands for methodological »purity« and mathematical modeling? To what extent must they have mastered the conceptual and methodological arsenal of the economic disciplines? Where and how can they acquire the necessary theoretical equipment?
- * Conversely, can the economic sciences and political economy in the political sciences or sociology be made more sensitive to the historical dimension and problems pertaining to their objects of inquiry—for the contingencies and ambiguities as well as the multi-layered contexts and contradictory intentions that lie at the heart of any historical analysis?
- * To what extent can a contemporary history that is focused on questions of political economy raise the claim, let alone satisfy the desire, to give a general view and systematic explanations of matters?

Suggested Reading

Peter A. Hall, *The Political Origins of Our Economic Discontents: Contemporary Adjustment Problems in Historical Perspective*. Draft chapter for: Miles Kahler, David Lake (Eds.): *Politics in the New Hard Times: The Great Recession in Comparative Perspective*. Cornell UP
[<http://www.people.fas.harvard.edu/~phall/Gourevitch.pdf>]

Werner Plumpe, »Moden und Mythen«. *Die Wirtschaft als Thema der Geschichtsschreibung im Umbruch 1960 bis 1980*. In: Dieter Hein, Klaus Hildebrand, Andreas Schulz (Hg.): *Historie und Leben. Der Historiker als Wissenschaftler und Zeitgenosse*. München: Oldenbourg, 2006; 209-234

Daniel T. Rodgers, *Age of Fracture*. Cambridge, MA, London: Belknap Press of Harvard UP, 2011; 41-76, 280-288

Hansjörg Siegenthaler, Geschichte und Ökonomie nach der kulturalistischen
Wende. In: *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*. 25(1999); 276-301

Jason Scott Smith, A Reintroduction to Political Economy: History, Institutions,
and Power. In: *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*. (2005),1; 63-71

Vorwort der Herausgeber. In: *Geschichte und Gesellschaft*. 1(1975)1; 5-7