

Analyzing the Crisis of Liberal Democracy by Investigating Connections Between Deliberative Democratic Theory, Criticism of Neoliberalism and Contemporary Marxist Political Economy

Authors : Inka Maria Vilhelmiina Hiltunen

Abstract : The crisis of liberal democracy has been recognized from many sites of political literature; scholars of Marxist critical political economy and deliberative democracy, as well as critics of neoliberalism, have become concerned about how either the rise of populism and authoritarianism, institutional decline or the overarching economic rationality erode political democratic citizenship in favor of economic technocracy or conservative protectionism. However, even if these bodies of literature recognize the generalized crisis that haunts Western democracies, dialogue between them has been very limited. That said, drawing from contemporary Marxist perspectives, this article aims at bridging the gap between the criticism of neoliberalism and theories of deliberative democracy. The first section starts by outlining what is meant by neoliberalism, liberal democracy, and the crisis of liberal democracy. The next section explores how contemporary capitalism acts upon society and transforms it. It introduces Jurgen Habermas' thesis of the 'colonization of the lifeworld', Wendy Brown's analysis of neoliberal rationality and Étienne Balibar's concepts of 'absolute capitalism' and 'total subsumption,' that the essay aims at connecting in the last section. The third section is concerned with the deliberative democratic theory and practice. The section highlights the qualitative socio-political impacts of deliberation, as predicted by theorists and shown by empirical studies. The last section draws from contemporary Marxist perspectives to examine the question if deliberative democratic theories and practices can resolve the crisis of liberal democracy in the current financially driven era of neoliberal capitalism. By asking this question, the essay aims to consider what is required to reverse the current global trend of rising inequality. If liberal democracy has declined towards commodified and reactionary forms of politics and if 'market rationality' has shaped social agency to the extent that politicians and the public struggle to imagine 'any alternatives', the most urgent political task is to bring to life a new political imagination based on democratic ideals of equality, inclusivity, reciprocity, and solidarity, that thereby enables the revision of the transnational institutional design. This part focuses on the hegemonic role of finance and money. The essay concludes by stating that the implementation of substantive global democracy must start from the dissolution of the hegemony of finance, centered on U.S., and from the remaking of the conditions of socioeconomic reproduction worldwide. However, given the still present overarching neoliberal status quo, the essay is skeptical of the ideological feasibility of this remaking.

Keywords : deliberative democracy, criticism of neoliberalism, marxist political economy, crisis of liberal democracy

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