

Beyond Growth?!

Statement and Appeal - by the Attac-Preparatory Group for the Beyond Growth Congress

Farewell to Growth - Onset of "the Good Life"

Growth without end?

Growth without limits is not possible in a finite planet. The global bio-crisis, above all the climate crisis and Peak Oil sets limits to growth. Growing energy demand can only be met with increasingly risky processes - the oil catastrophe in the Gulf of Mexico and the Atomic disaster in Japan are only the most visible of examples.

Economic growth cannot be decoupled from a growing consumption of resources and growing pollution. The hope for a "green", "qualitative" or "selective" growth is an illusion that partly serves to justify business as usual, the predominant production system and the imperial lifestyle of the industrial countries, rather than putting these into question. On the contrary, a "healthy contraction" of the economy to a stable state of balance is necessary. The structuring of this economic disarmament process in the direction of a solidarity economy is the decisive task for the coming years.

Perspectives Beyond Growth

Growth critique, and the search for perspectives for the economy and society beyond growth, are a project that is critical of globalisation. Our conceptions of growth are not aimed at shrinking the economy in its existing economic and social structures, and in its existing unequal distributive relationships, as neoliberal and neofeudal forms of growth criticism advocate. Instead we need to realise concrete social rights for all humans - today and in the future, here and everywhere else. Only by turning away from the growth madness in the global North can global ecological justice be possible. The following perspectives multiple thoughts and actions for global social movements:

* Social-ecological reconstruction

Industrial societies have to get by in the future with significantly reduced production and with reduced energy intensive services. This puts into question the very basis of capitalism because, in capitalism, investment only takes place, when there is the anticipation of a greater sum coming back after the investment in a return. That, in turn, is only possible when not only more is produced but that greater quantity is sold.

The population have to play along with this. They have to subordinate themselves to a continuous - more, bigger and faster imperative. Needs, human work and the consumption of natural resources are aligned with this abstract aim. In a post growth perspective however there is a different question about what concrete products and services are really needed to satisfy the needs of people with the smallest possible consumption of natural resources.

* Energy democracy

A speedy conversion to renewable energy and its most efficient use is urgently called for. But also, even if that is achieved, the current consumption model cannot be maintained. A significant reduction of total energy consumption is unavoidable. The energy sector must be fundamentally reorganised - decentralised, freed of the influence of the companies, and put under democratic control. The fossil sectors of the economy - oil, coal and gas must shrink rapidly and dramatically. A first step in this direction would be for the immediate exit from atomic energy to be organised in such a way that the energy that is no longer available is not produced from substitute sources, but covered by energy savings. The price of electric power must above all be made much more expensive for those that use it the most. Just to make the biggest consumers of electricity pay the highest tariffs for its use, thereby turning upside down the existing tariffs, would achieve the necessary effect.

* Deglobalisation

Climate change, plus the reduction of the fuels necessary to power the transport required by global production chains, make deglobalisation and a break with free trade doctrine urgently necessary. Global financial markets must be democratically regulated and contracted significantly. Regionalisation and the localisation of products, distribution and consumption are urgently necessary. This is a process in which it is important reactionary retraditionalisation is forestalled. Nutritional "sovereignty" (self determination) and energy democracy can be introductory projects for deglobalisation.

Dangerous Technologies

Destructive and dangerous technologies like atomic energy, genetic engineering of the arms industry have to be removed because they are basically not controllable and the worst catastrophes in the genetic or nano technology sectors would put the entire biosphere in danger. But their removal would also make a space for low energy and low emission, resource saving processes.

* Technologies and Processes without use Value

Many economic processes only take place because they increase the profits of business. This includes a large proportion of transport and trade volumes, cheap products made to wear out as quickly, almost all the packaging and rubbish industry, advertising and much else. All these can go with without any substitutes.

* Anti-Militarism and Migration

If the existing growth economic system is maintained the increasing scarcity of resources will increase the danger of resource wars. This is no abstract danger - such wars are already happening. Against this background strengthening of anti-military and pacifist organisations is decisively important - in order to counter the legitimisation of military interventions. The European Borders Agency Frontex, struggles at the EU borders against refugees, and increasingly also against the victims of resource wars and climate catastrophe. It is of decisive that European society is made aware of its responsibility for people like this and opens its borders.

* Redistribution and Social Security

In view of the necessary contraction of the economy and the increasing scarcity of resources it is necessary to overcome the idea that it is only possible to have redistribution, when the economy is growing. The demand to organise scarce resources on solidarity principles, to hinder processes where an elite takes a disproportionate share of scarce natural resources while an ever larger proportion of the population cannot even meet their basic needs, is not new. There is enough for everyone but this does not mean that everyone can have all that they want. An attentive and responsible way of dealing with ecological and geographical limits are essential. The necessary farewell to current lifestyle habits (eg a yearly holiday flight) will only find the necessary acceptance through a democratic process which is felt to be just and in which the social rights and freedom of all people are respected. If, as a first step, the unproductive and wasteful consumption of the elite is cut, it will be far easier for other people to come to the view that they too have to make their own contribution to consumption cuts.

* Global Justice

The political challenge of achieving a more just social policy in the context of scarcer resources is global. Social justice must be thought about and realised with a global measuring stick. The justifiable interests of people in poor countries must be recognised. First of all is a secure

access to adequate means of nutrition and the demand for nutritional self determination (nutritional sovereignty).

* Reduction in hours of employment

A radical reduction in work time can be a central project in the direction of a solidarity based post growth economy. The current level of goods production is only possible through the consumption (and waste) of much fossil energy. The resulting volume of products is much greater than is necessary for a good life. The volume of products and energy consumption must shrink and that means too, that the total volume of active employed labour time must shrink too. At the same time it will be possible to redistribute socially necessary activities like education, care, political and artistic involvement in a way that is fair to both genders. In many sectors, as before, the productivity of labour will continue to rise, but there will also be conversions to low energy processes that will require more labour than before. A conversion from industrial to organic agriculture will save energy and raise overall production, but require more labour because of the reduction of the use of machinery. It is not at all the case that more sectors must expand forced in a market based logic - as foreseen by some thinkers in their models of "qualitative growth" - where growth in the service sector is anticipated. Instead as many spheres of life as possible will be organised outside of the logic of markets.

Commons and de-monetarisation

We will struggle against the rabid trend towards privatisation and advocate instead that, in particular in spheres of life where basic needs are met, the logic of profit maximation should be taken away and replaced democratic and responsible arrangements. This includes the health sector, education, culture and mobility. The decisive criteria for these sectors are human needs rather than higher dividends and the arrangements need to match these.

* Solidarity Economy

We should be aiming to achieve collective economic and living arrangements that are removed from growth compulsion, empowering people to have a good life beyond the compulsions of the capitalism and its drive for ever higher values: co-operative take overs so that more and more production are in peoples' own hands; the build up of local and regional structures for economic solidarity and democracy. These changes will make people more independent. They are, potentially, the seeds of a new, more humane post growth economy, offering a good life for all.

Solidarity based lifestyles

Such a transformation involves far more than technical innovation, it requires lively, responsible and solidarity motivated subjects. It will be decisive that there is a structural and cultural change towards a culture of 'sufficiency' when dealing with significantly less energy, raw materials, and material products. We are aware that to coherently lead and maintain our struggle against the dangers of the growth economy we will need much mutual support. We will need support too in our everyday lives to break with the productivism, the imperial lifestyle and consumerism.

This Congress as Starting Point

Many of the necessities and aims that we have mentioned here have been fought for a long time already in Europe, and globally. The movement against atomic and genetic technologies, anti militarist mobilisations, struggles against inhumane migration arrangements the whole world over are the places for engagement and commitment. Not the least we see our role as ensuring that with these partners in struggle for a socially just world we do not fall into a chauvinist defence of a questionable kind of wellbeing.

In order to begin to search for the concrete answers to these questions we have organised the Congress "Beyond growth". Simultaneously, we see this Congress as directed to all of society in a urgent appeal to become actively involved in the discourse on the the shape of a future society beyond growth. For it depends on us, if in the face of the impending changes, whether we are to be just driven by them or, whether we are, in full awareness, to shape what is to happen.