

## **Bruno Amoroso: a Man for all Seasons**

Jesper Jespersen\*

\* Department of Social Sciences and Business, Roskilde University, Denmark.  
*Correspondance:* jesperj@ruc.dk

---

I met Bruno for the first time back in 1985. I had just come back from one year of doing research in Italy – being a Jean Monnet Fellow at the European University Institute (EUI) in Firenze. During my stay at EUI I had been working on a book called 'Imbalances of the Danish economy: What to do?' It was an academic work with a number of policy suggestions of how to reduce unemployment. I sent a copy of the book to colleagues, which I thought would take an interest into the 'political economy of Denmark'. The only one who responded spontaneously was Bruno. He invited me without hesitation for lunch in his lovely house in the centre of Copenhagen. It was a sunny spring-day we sat at first floor, and Bruno listened more than he spoke – at that occasion. He was already at that time deeply involved in research into the political and economic aspects of the Danish society with special reference to the functioning of the Scandinavian welfare states.

Bruno's life-long academic interest was to understand the dynamics of the present political economic systems at the national level, the European level and the global level. My book could help him to get more insight into the dynamics (and macroeconomic implications) of the Danish welfare state within a European context.

Quite quickly, we started to collaborate on his project of organizing a yearly conference and collection of papers, called 'social economics year book' (socialøkonomisk årbog). This project was running for 4-5 years with the aim of bringing mainly young scholars together by asking them to contribute to the conference with themes from the real world, which cause social concern.

Bruno was docent at Roskilde University. His realist view on society was quite a challenge (and novelty) to a number of his colleagues at these days. At Roskilde University the theoretical view on political economy was by most scholars during

---

the 1970s and further on into the 1980s taken from a rather strict Marxist orthodox viewpoint. Bruno's aim was different. From the very beginning of his academic career the focus point was on the understanding of the dynamics of the real society, not a hypothetical one and the conditions for a 'good society'. He saw the Danish welfare state as a practical and functional case of class collaboration rather than class antagonism (and struggle). For him this real outcome of political economics did correspond with his study of economics at Rome University la Sapienza under the supervision of Frederico Caffé, an internationally well-known post-Keynesian scholar.

Theoretically, Bruno and I shared common ground. At that time I was teaching international economics at the Copenhagen Business School and had been trained in conventional Keynesian economics – one could call it orthodox ISLM – economics with a very mechanical view on (macro-)economics, hardly taking the political perspective into consideration. I learned a lot from conversations with Bruno. I can easily recall his wise eyes, when he with a smile on his face could say *«How can you be so naive, Jesper? Look at the real world, the economy does not function as your models tell you»*. To Bruno the conventional economic arguments were much too often dominated by an unhappy mixture of ideology and naive academic thinking: people (with power) saying one thing, but with another intention, which the neoclassical economists supported by the use of mathematical models detached from the real world. Bruno was always sceptic when he heard arguments dressed up with phrases like: this is a 'necessary politics' although causing hardship to ordinary people. He always double-checked such arguments. Other examples of his often-used phrases were: *«There are at least two sides of any case»* or *«don't fool yourself by a single number»*.

Bruno directed me to a number of seminal works by political economists that, in fact, often were more philosophers than economists: Keynes, of course, we already shared, but Karl Polanyi, John Kenneth Galbraith and Gunnar Myrdal I learned to appreciate from him. I learned to be a critical realist from working with Bruno.

Fortunately, I got the opportunity to move from Copenhagen Business School to Roskilde University in the early 1990s. The tide was changing in political economics even at Roskilde University. Marxism was in decline. Unfortunately, at the benefit of neoclassical economics. Therefore, Bruno and I had to stand up against this change of political fundamentalism within political economics from one dogmatism to another. We had to insist on pluralism in teaching economics at Roskilde University. It took quite some years and struggle to establish a critical realist position and to write the needed textbook. Without Bruno's active support we would not have succeeded in creating and get acceptance for this pluralist breathing space in political economics, which we managed to establish

at Roskilde University.

During the years, we wrote a number of books together on political economy mainly with a shared focus on European Economics and with an institutional/post-Keynesian analytical out-set. For instance, we developed an analytical argument against the introduction of the Euro as a single currency in Europe (and especially in Denmark). The outcome of our analysis was already in the late 1990s that the euro could be a disaster to the weakest nations and to the most vulnerable part of the population in any euro-country, because of increased macroeconomics imbalances and lack of national policy instruments. The conventional neoclassical economists of course rejected this analysis. They only saw reduced transaction costs, safeguard against inflation and, hence, increased growth by all participating countries. They could not see in their models that the euro easily could be a highway for increased German hegemony, and hereby sow the seed for future antagonism and rising nationalism. This is just one example of how our work benefited from being critical realists: one cannot state an affirmative conclusion about the future; but analyses supported by real world arguments are more often than not also the most realistic ones.

This life-long collaboration with Bruno was very fruitful to me. I learned to consider methodology as an important discipline in social science. Research without deliberate methodology could easily lead the conclusion astray in an unreal direction. This heritage of how to undertake research I have benefited from ever since during my academic carrier leading up to my doctorate dissertation on Macroeconomic Methodology in 2007. It is not only ideology; but also methodology, which has an underestimated impact on the outcome of social sciences. This is one of the lasting conclusions from my conversations with Bruno during more than thirty years.

Bruno had many more interests than theoretical political economy. He had contacts with politicians, trade unionists, academics and organizations all over the world. He travelled a lot. China and South East Asia became increasingly his main concern. Setting-up a home for street-children in Hanoi was just one of his many outstanding initiatives to create a real 'good society'. For obvious reasons his best-known book had the title 'On Globalization' (from 1999). To Bruno the world was, after the cold war had ended, opening up, but also becoming smaller for good and for bad. He saw the opportunities and the risks; but he was never naive and therefore seldom disillusioned.

Bruno was a wise man: A man for all seasons. Fortunately, his thoughts and insights will be with us for many years to come.