

Student: Martin Slaba

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Topic: Master`s Thesis, „Hartz IV and the Labour Market Miracle – Causality or Coincidence?“

1. The author is interested in analysing a possible direct connection between the Hartz IV reform and the development of the unemployment in Germany. He uses a wide range of literature, mainly English and some German. He comes to the conclusion that the increase in relative poverty was not caused primarily by Hartz IV. It was more a by-product of increasing inequality in the German society since the turn of the century.
2. From the methodological point of view the study causes a couple of problems. While some scholars of economics and sociology are using statistical methods in an extensive way, most of the historians are rather careful here: descriptive statistics is welcome, analytical statistics alone, however, can not sufficiently analyse the complexity of societies. Very often it is impossible to reduce manifold developments to one independent and one dependent variable. Therefore from the methodological point of view the study is not really persuasive.
3. The study is written in a fluent and correct English, the level of the language is rather high. If one accepts the author`s methodological presuppositions the logical structure and his research design are plausible.
4. The general problem is that on the one hand his approach is too narrow for the rather complicated topic, on the other one it is too broad for a masters thesis. He does not really reach the level of a pluralistic analysis although some of his arguments are persuasive and strong. It is a diligent piece of work and his knowledge of the relevant research literature is both promising and impressive.
Some small mistakes can be ignored for this evaluation: F. e. Slaba underestimates the role of the German trade unions, which were never as weak as he claims. The IG Metall was and is still the strongest free trade union in the world. Here the use of the concept of „*Rheinischer Kapitalismus*“ (close cooperation between unions and organizations of firm owners for mutual benefit) could have been helpful also for the analysis of the Hartz IV results.
5. Possible questions for the oral defense of the study:
 - How reliable are the official German statistics of unemployment? (Problem f.e. of women which are not officially registered).
 - Did any international developments might have influenced the economic trends of the German labour market as well? (For example the role of China, USA etc. as outlets)
 - Is it possible to write a mainly economic study in the national frame only? The German economy is extremely globalized and fully integrated into several international organizations (like the EU).
6. According to my opinion the grade is exactly between „B“ and „C“. The final grade should be given after the oral exam.