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# A LEFT GREEN NEW DEAL

## An Internationalist Blueprint

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MONTHLY REVIEW PRESS

*New York*

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This book was written in cooperation with the Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung and its Institute for Critical Social Analysis. It is funded with help from the German Foreign Office. This is an edited version of the book that was first published in German by VSA Verlag in Hamburg.

ISBN 978-158367-945-6 paper  
ISBN 978-158367-946-3 cloth

Typeset in Bulmer MT Std and DIN condensed

MONTHLY REVIEW PRESS, NEW YORK  
[monthlyreview.org](http://monthlyreview.org)

5 4 3 2 1

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## Cataclysms of our Time

### THE CRISES

**W**e stand at a historical turning point, as the new decade begins. A series of capitalism's crises have long been looming: the crisis of the financial markets and the economy, climate change and the planetary limits of growth, social inequality, the breakdown of social infrastructure. Many people have the feeling that society is no longer holding together.

The COVID-19 pandemic has intensified and worsened these multilayered crises of capitalism. Public life has come to a near standstill in many countries undergoing lockdown, with dramatic consequences for national economies that were already stagnating. As the German government and the European Union launched a range of emergency measures to combat the COVID-19 crisis, persistent myths about the "self-correcting" powers of the market and the urgent imperative to refuse government debt (*schwarze Null* or "black zero") were thrown overboard, at least for the time being. Suddenly, after decades of governments refusing to invest in healthcare, education, or social housing, it became clear: the state can mobilize titanic sums of money very quickly.

Capitalism is reliant on the growth of profits. But, in a world of finite resources and ecosystems with their own limits, this leads to catastrophes. As capitalism clashes against the limits of natural resources and its own model of expansion, planet Earth cannot cope with the exploitation of its

resources and the pollution of its environment. Major economic transformation and radical changes in the social and cultural institutions that organize our lives are becoming necessary for survival. The fact that we cannot continue as usual has become obvious to many people beyond those now hitting the streets with the call to save the planet.

Climate change is destroying the livelihoods of millions. Worst off are the poorest parts of the population in the Global South. But prolonged bouts of heat in the summer and drought will also deteriorate Northern agriculture. Yet governments around the world announce measures that fall dramatically short of what is needed. These measures will fail to cap global warming at 1.5 to 2 degrees. Hunger, distress, and a war for resources will follow. Without a radical turn, this is a death sentence for millions of people whose houses will be swept underwater and whose agricultural produce will dry up or flood.

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) estimates that we have only fifteen years to create a CO<sub>2</sub>-neutral economy and infrastructure. The threat of climate change will increasingly affect economic development, as insurance companies and management consultants forecast trillions in losses over the next few decades. Their concern is less on the people affected than on their shareholders and clients.

The United States, Australia, and Brazil are supreme obstacles to climate protection measures. It is no coincidence that these are countries with right-wing governments. Clearly, Germany is falling short of its climate goals. Germany's plan to phase out coal by 2038 also falls short. The project of renewable energy is hardly substantial; the expansion of wind energy has hit an impasse. In fact, the future of the clean energy industry to fight climate crisis is unclear. Now, during the COVID-19 pandemic, environmental movements and scientists warn that the climate crisis might be shoved into the background.



The extraordinary sums of money currently being pumped by governments and central banks into the economy act as gasoline to keep the engine working while the car drives in the wrong direction. Taken literally, in Germany—even if it were possible to stamp out car rebate schemes and support for fuel-guzzling limousines—well over 20 billion euros still flow into the auto industry via direct and indirect subsidies.

We are at the beginning of a massive reorganization of the automotive industry and branches bound up with it. New technologies and production models are having a great impact on workplaces, wages, and skills, even in service industries. Most wage laborers know that change needs to happen, but they simultaneously worry about their jobs and future. They are right to worry. Even without transformation to electric vehicles, big players like Daimler and their more dependent suppliers are beginning massive layoffs, reductions in costs, and wage cuts.

Globally, the picture is the same. When the economy undergoes crisis, those without savings and those whose jobs are first to go are the ones who suffer first. But when “the economy” is thriving, not all workers benefit, and growth continues to the detriment of the earth’s climate. Unless we succeed in prising apart this vicious circle.

### **The World in Disorder**

The economic and climate crises create new threats of war. Some people already speak of the inexorable decline of the West and see China and India as the future economic powerhouses. We can see that the West and its leading nation, the United States, aren’t going to accept this prospect meekly. Within the international context, the struggle for leadership and domination can easily turn into hot wars, and the hegemonic power, the United States, is armed to the teeth.

Its military budget of almost 700 billion USD is greater than the combined wealth of the rest of the Western states. It is almost three times that of China and more than ten times that of Russia.

With such maneuvers as the positioning of missile defense systems in South Korea, the U.S. military alignment is increasingly turning against China. The Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty with Russia has ended. Regional wars in the Middle East (involving NATO countries) and conflicts in the South China Sea or between rival countries such as India and Pakistan have intensified. During his years in office, U.S. President Trump only amplified the military and economic confrontations. The People's Republic of China is also building up arms, even if on a lower level. The U.S.-initiated trade war is an omen of sharper conflicts to come.

Germany and the European Union have their own interests along these lines of conflict. Fretful that it will squander influence, the European Union is reacting with plans for military rearmament, strengthened military cooperation within the Union, and encouraging the buildup of a European army capable of intervention. Germany is also preparing itself. To reach the agreed NATO goal of 2 percent military spending of the Gross Domestic Product (GDP), a doubling of the budget for arms is needed. In this context, the German defense minister Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer is calling for the buildup of the Bundeswehr's "interventions capability" to extend to military action in other countries.

Some ruling political powers are preparing themselves for the eventuality that the struggles over the distribution of ever-scarcer resources will come to the fore, against the backdrop of the climate crisis. Their vision is not the creation of an economy based on climate justice, but the building of walls, fortified with barbed wire and the military.

## The Pandemic Is Intensifying Already Existing Troubles

Quite separate from the financial crisis, the COVID pandemic has made visible the essential role groups of workers play in our societal life: nurses and caregivers, food-service employees, postal workers, and many more whose labor is poorly paid and whose working conditions are precarious. They have been praised by the media and politicians as guarantors of the critical infrastructure. Underpaid cashiers who weeks before could be fired on the spot because of the discrepancy of a couple of euros, now received universal social recognition. Yet hopes that this recognition would translate into decent wage increases have sunk.

While the Merkel government buries the issue with cheers and applause, the wages of healthcare workers and caregivers haven't risen. Millions of workers who are barely able to make ends meet go empty-handed before lavish economic handouts to corporations. We hear it stressed over and over that demand for products should be strengthened. The simplest way to do so would be to align state corporate support to collective bargaining agreements, to introduce sectional collective agreements, and to significantly increase the minimum wage. Many workers would be helped in that way. But, for employed workers and those on the Hartz IV program (reforms introduced in 2003 by German government to toughen conditions under which people claim welfare or unemployment benefits), nothing was planned. The government has obviously resigned them to poverty and exclusion.

Before the pandemic, a large part of the German working class never benefited from the years of economic growth during the so-called German Miracle. Although the workforce has increased, jobs are mostly in the low-wage sector, with casual contracts and without collective bargaining. Eight million people now work in the low-wage sector alone,

with about 25 percent of employees working in precarious conditions. The inequality in income and wealth distribution has assumed a scope of mind-boggling proportions.

The politics behind budget cuts has devastated public life: in schools, where parts of old ceilings drop onto students and the toilets are filthy; in childcare centers with long waiting lists; in overcrowded high schools, hospitals, and nursing homes for the aged where a massive crisis of care has prevailed for years. Hospitals are being closed because they aren't turning a profit; the housing rental market is given over to speculation; the public transport system has become an issue of perennial public outrage. These grievances shape the everyday lives of millions of people.

In June 2020, the German government released a €130 billion economic stimulus package, a huge amount of money that was used to protect German industry's market leadership. By contrast, the investment bottleneck in public and social infrastructure that has built up over the last few decades has not been alleviated. Lufthansa Airlines alone receives twice as much money as ordinary families receive for the government "corona bonus." Lufthansa is not even compelled to meet conditions pertaining to job or climate protections.

The German federal government's economic policy is primarily concerned with immediate short-term economic stabilization, combined with the modernization of capitalism through new technologies. The export industry remains undisturbed. Combined with this is the German economy's reliance on the debt-driven purchase by other countries of German services and goods, among which are electric cars. However, this grand coalition is not moving toward a necessary change to a social-ecological transformation of the economy and society.

Prior to the coronavirus crisis, Germany's relatively long economic upturn had descended into stagnation. The

overproduction of cars, for instance, became obvious, and the companies are now reacting with mass layoffs in the car supply industry. Germany's export-oriented economic model is caught in a jam and cannot be supported for much longer.

In order to emerge from the crisis and attain a competitive "modernization" of industry, corporations are looking eagerly toward the state. Massive investments in infrastructure and production sites are to be funded by taxpayers. But we have known since the financial crisis of 2008, when billions of euros for banks and corporations were laid out to stabilize neoliberal capitalism, that calls on the state alone do not mean the end of the neoliberal model.

The necessary measures taken to contain the first wave of the pandemic have substantially sharpened the processes of crisis. Although the dynamic of the second wave is unpredictable, it has already resulted in a dramatic increase in the loss of human lives and rising social insecurity and costs. Economic indicators point toward a deeper and longer crisis than the world economic and financial crisis of 2008–2009.

The powers that be have reacted with economic stimulus programs that are far more comprehensive than those of the previous financial crisis, and they hope for a quick recovery. As the ECB (European Central Bank) lines the financial markets with a total of €1.35 trillion, the outlay designed to oil the accumulation process with cheap money is increasing. The effects are questionable, because demand remains weak due to depressed wages and unemployment. In short, neoliberalism is no longer capable of bringing about a new mode of growth and accumulation for capitalism. A longer crisis is probable, particularly since the financial crisis caused by a decade of welfare losses in Europe's southern states has not been overcome. The crisis of the European Union could reach a climax. We, in the left in Germany and in countries across the world, must position ourselves for higher unemployment and harder struggles over the distribution of wealth.

## AUTHORITARIAN CAPITALISM OR MODERNIZATION?

The world is undergoing a radical change and neoliberal capitalism is mired in multifaceted crises. The coming years will be shaped by the struggle to solve these crises. New capitalistic formations are not only the result of powerful capital, economic, and technological transformations. The power relations between capital and labor, which impact the political, ideological, and scientific superstructure, as well as the societal struggles around it, are deciding the world in which we will live ten years from now.

### Authoritarian Capitalism

We see in countries like the United States, Great Britain, Hungary, Poland, and Turkey that authoritarian nationalistic forms of capitalism are the neo-right's (*neofascist* might readily apply here) answer to the crisis of the neoliberal era. In the international rivalry for position, the path taken by the right is that of a strengthening of the neoliberal strategy of the competitive state. The state needs to be reorganized along authoritarian lines, and the emptying out of democracy needs to be pushed ahead. The social and economic policies of right-wing state projects, such as those in Austria, can be neoliberal, but this need not be the case in countries such as Poland, where support for families and social policy can concurrently accompany isolationist and reactionary nationalist ideology.

The right presents itself as the preserver of the status quo. Rightists promise to intervene through rallying against refugees and migrants. If they were to win power, democratic institutions would be ridden roughshod over or annulled, critical media would be attacked, progressive movements would be scorned, independent justice and parliamentary rights reduced, and repression of "minorities" or political enemies intensified. This includes suppressing voter partic-

ipation of Blacks and Latinx in the United States through stricter voter identification laws. Racism is an integral part of this policy.

Many right-wingers, like Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil and Donald Trump when he was president, are deniers of human-induced global warming. They do this while cognizant of the explosive nature of confrontations over distribution, which more and more assume the character of a struggle over the future. The crucial point for them is that resources must be available—not for humanity, but for their followers. They are therefore politically, culturally, economically, and even militarily arming themselves. Their treatment of the pandemic shows an irrational denial of science, combined with social Darwinism and neoliberal politics.

Trump lost the U.S. presidential election not due to Biden's political strength, but due to a broad-based anti-Trump mobilization. But the bloc of both the old and new right in the United States is by no means weakened. There is currently little reason to hope that a President Biden will answer the social and economic crisis with a social-ecological investment program and tax increases for corporations and the rich. It is more likely that austerity and redistribution of wealth from the bottom up will continue. The crisis of democracy and the morally bankrupt U.S. electoral system will likely continue. After all, the danger of a powerful return of "Trumpism" remains.

In the next few years, it will be important to strengthen organizing and work toward rooting the left in the everyday life and struggles for survival of the wage-dependent class. The challenge is to build pressure from below on the new U.S. government through campaigns and strikes. Hope in this situation comes from the renewed left around Bernie Sanders and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, the young movement for a Green New Deal, and the Sunrise Movement (youth movement that wants to stop climate change) that inspires hundreds of thousands of young people.

In Germany, a right-wing authoritarian model would be possible, if the right-wing forces within the CDU (Christian Democratic Union of Germany) and the national neoliberal tendencies in the traditional liberal FDP (Free Democratic Party) were to enter a coalition with the right-wing-populist AfD (Alternative for Germany), which has a strong neofascist wing. At the beginning of 2020, the Thuringia state parliament, for the first time in its post-Second World War history, voted in an FDP prime minister with CDU and extreme right votes. This right-wing breakthrough held up for only a few days, when broad protests stopped the new alliance from stabilizing.

The CDU experienced an intense political crisis, which may not be resolved soon. At the beginning of 2021, they appeared to be the “winner” in the field of parties, profiting from the government’s strong role in pandemic crisis management and legally limiting media coverage for any opposition. The major forces within the CDU, aiming toward liberal parts of the population, focus on modernizing the German neoliberal model. Without tackling the social crises of precarity and social disinvestment, this might widen the space for right-wing populism. At the same time, strong forces within the CDU call for a reorientation toward conservatism for the coming “post-Merkel era.”

### **Green Modernization of Capitalism**

The export-oriented parts of capital are primarily reliant on a modernization of capitalism. But the neoliberal bloc is split over the question of how to deal best with the crises and the right-wing authoritarian option. No clear project has formed from the powers of the ruling block shaped by the previous neoliberalism. Roughly two different versions of modernization in the crisis are taking shape: a clear neoliberal re-regulation and a green modernized capitalism.



French President Macron, Austrian Chancellor Kurz, and German Chancellor Merkel stand for distinct variants of a neoliberal modernization strategy, which finds echoes in parts of the Green parties. This strategy accepts the demand for climate protection, but as a factor of interstate competition—in Merkel’s case, for Germany’s high-tech export model, achieved with low wages and precarious labor while reducing costs. The international division of labor is hardly called into question; nor is the plundering and exploitation of resources of the Global South. There can be no solution to the climate crisis with this model.

In contrast to the hard right, some “modernizers” want to regulate trade relations a bit more strictly, but with a strong effort to strengthen their position in increasing global competition. The state should take care that its mobile and digital infrastructure is built up and financed. Insofar as this is the case, this model is connected to state regulation and investment policy in terms of modernized corporate business models. The ways in which these policies and their combinations might be financed are still open, though there are definite boundaries, and they also depend on the specific balance of forces of different countries: higher debt (marginally), tax increases, and new rounds of social attacks and austerity programs.

The only certainty here is that a just taxation of the rich and powerful is not an option. The neoliberal framework will not be torn; instead, it will be stabilized in the face of the crisis. Whether the modernization is tied to limited social compromises for a portion of the working class or whether it will be combined with a new offensive of capital, with tax cuts for bosses, deregulation, and social attacks is an open question. To be clear, with respect to social measures, the crisis narrows the room for maneuver without a redistribution of wealth away from the wealthiest. In any case, increasing social antagonisms and precaritization cannot be

overcome through a “green” modernization that does not tackle the relations of production and distribution of wealth and income that have been set by neoliberalism for decades.

If we look at Macron’s policy of exceptional, and repressive, state measures, including the brutal repression of the Yellow Vest (*gilets jaunes*) movement and popular protests against pension cuts and police intimidation of those living in French suburbs, it is clear that authoritarian policies of counterinsurgency and the dismantling of democracy cannot be excluded from the practice of modernization, a practice that is much less peaceful and harmonious in actuality than in discourse. The inner contradictions will rise, particularly if the technological modernization of the economy fails to produce a new model of growth and development.

The model of a green-modernized capitalism stands in contrast with a stronger ecological regulation that is also partly social. At least the Greens in Germany have taken over the old Social Democratic motto, “Technical progress plus social harmony.” Taxes and carbon pricing are supposed to attain a greater ecological alignment with the business model of corporations and consumption. Fundamentally, this version of modernization assumes that it does not have to oppose big corporations and owners of wealth; rather, it can be realized through cooperation with them. Leaders of the Greens like Robert Habeck and Annalena Baerbock see their party project as a “party of alliances” (*Bündnispartei*) with its feet planted on a “radical and realistic” policy. They are thereby renewing the image of the Greens, both among the young generation, who are looking for thoroughgoing alternatives, and the bourgeois middle class, who fall within the gamut of the Christian Democrats.

Because economic competitiveness and the power of business are seldom questioned, the room for social policy maneuver remains severely reduced. The Green variant of middle-of-the-road, social democratic politics rests on a

minimum of social security, meant to guard against poverty. This is different and more than a Blair and Schröder-style deconstruction of social democracy (in 1999, Tony Blair and Gerhard Schröder published a paper to modernize their social democratic parties), but it is less than the old Social Democratic promise of equal social participation for everybody. One reason for this is that, unlike the Social Democrats of the post-Second World War period, these adherents are unable to promise growth for all wage laborers. Better working and living conditions, let alone a stronger welfare state in the twenty-first century, cannot materialize without a rupture with the structure of financial capitalism and conflict with businesses and the wealthy.

Questions pertaining to the redistribution of wealth are mostly ignored by the German Greens. Their politics are well made for times when the weather is better—as if a win-win constellation for capital, labor, and the climate were possible. Theirs is a project reliant on the reason and insight of all actors, thereby ignoring the existence of solid class interests and conflict. If a Black-Green coalition (“Black” here refers to the CDU) were to come about, not much of this Green promise will be left. As economic room for maneuver dwindles, this can turn quickly into austerity measures and neoliberal “labor market reforms.” Even if a Black-Green modernization alliance seems to be in the short-term offing (the most likely outcome for a post-Merkel era), this might not be a stable block for the coming decade of increasing social, ecological, and political contradictions.

### **A Green New Deal for Europe?**

The ruling powers’ search for a way out of multiple crises takes place within the fight over the future of Europe. The hitherto neoliberal path cannot go forward without the European Union drifting further apart. Since the great crisis of 2008,

which mutated into the Euro Crisis of 2012 (Eurozone Debt Crisis), the tension has augmented. The European Union continues to balance itself on the brink of the void. Neoliberal austerity measures and dismantling of social services, with constitutional legitimation in the European Union, has ruined healthcare systems in many countries, pushed up youth unemployment, and blocked investment for ecological reforms. A range of authoritarian regimes like those in Hungary and Poland, which appear to be formal democracies, actually push a process (tolerated by the European Union!) of authoritarian restructuring of the state apparatus, without other states standing against it. Every year, thousands of migrants die at Europe's borders because the European Union cordons itself off against refugees, violating international human rights and its Fundamental Rights Charter.

For some years, the neoliberal powers have been looking for a way to restore political cooperation without having to disturb the neoliberal foundation of the Stability and Competition Pact, the Lisbon Treaty, and the European Union's currency system, all of which serve to maintain the kind of economic stability most beneficial to capital. The state is supposed to invest more in the economy to strengthen the European Union in its rivalry with China and the United States. The European Union's summer 2020 program of billions bears this mark, even if there were dogged disagreements between Merkel, Macron, Kurz, and Rutte at the EU summit over financing and the relation between credit loans and direct economic aid.

Toward the end of 2019, the president of the EU Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, proclaimed the concept of a Green Deal designed to strengthen the coordination of climate and economic policies of the European Union. Massive investments in new technologies for efficient resource use and the reduction of greenhouse gas emissions were the goals.

This seems like a beautiful idea, but a closer look reveals

it to be a motley mixture of “greenwashing” amid policies of economic competition. The goal of achieving a “green zero” by 2050 is progress for the European Union, but it is hardly enough to halt a climate catastrophe. While investments toward climate protection should be financed from a fund, many of the EU money jars are handing over billions of euros to projects that are climate destructive. Instead of obligatory ecological standards for renewable energy production, mobility, industry, and agriculture, the failed emissions trading schemes—financialization instead of a solution for the climate crisis—continue. The hard reality is that the EU Commission’s Green Deal is a growth strategy in the interests of big corporations, with which neither the climate crisis nor the social crisis can be answered. The challenge for the left in Europe is not to align with these policies for neoliberal modernization and their greenwashing discourse. It is to reclaim the Green New Deal for the left, from below, by setting up in practice as well as in discourse a popular and radical project for a social-ecological transformation that breaks with the powers and structures of neoliberal capitalism.

### SOCIAL-ECOLOGICAL SYSTEM CHANGE

The right-wing answer of authoritarian-nationalist capitalism is a disaster scenario. The Green project (and partly the Social Democratic one, too) of a modernized “green” capitalism comes up short. Our task—all of us—is to put a left-wing alternative on the agenda. Since the failure of “really existing socialism” in the 1990s, government rulers have peddled the falsehood that “there is no alternative,” and progressive forces have bemoaned the lack of left-wing leadership. However, many proposals for left-wing societal alternatives in the twenty-first century have been elaborated. The present crisis, with its devastating authoritarian threats and catastrophic escalation, compels us to go forward, hand-in-hand, and

present a left-wing project for leadership, in political practice and in the everyday lives of ordinary people.

Ten years of rebellion are behind us. Today's younger generation did not come of age in the desert of the 1990s, which lacked alternatives. Many have witnessed how people have fought against global and local exploitation in the Arab Spring, Occupy Wall Street, Refugee Welcome, Yellow Vests, the #MeToo movement, Black Lives Matter, protests in Hong Kong, Chile, Sudan, Iraq, and Lebanon. Huge sections of youth are politicized. According to a 2018 Gallup Poll, more than half of those under the age of thirty in the United States see socialism as positive. In times of global economic crisis, the power relations between classes change and new political forces can take shape. Which forces gain strength and triumph depends on us.

Many millions of people around the world hit the streets in 2019 to save the planet—a historic caesura. The climate movement is politicizing a whole generation, fighting for its future. This generation demands urgent change. It stands opposed to the concerted interests of business and those who benefit from the existing economic system. A better future for the majority of people is possible if we push through another economic policy and step into a socially just and ecologically viable system change.

The basic idea behind social and ecological system change—a really left Green New Deal—is clear enough. No person should be forced to choose between a good life, here and now, and the future of our planet. No worker should be compelled to choose between a good job and the future of their children. We can save the climate only by investing in socially meaningful labor and social welfare for all, and by achieving a climate-neutral reorganization of infrastructure and the economy. That's a gigantic task.

For some years now the German Greens have tried to appropriate the concept of a Green New Deal while, as their

intellectual architect Ralf Fücks has laid bare, setting forth a “green market economy.” Among climate and environmental movements, the idea of a Green New Deal is discussed in a different way. We propose seizing it from the left, with a leadership project that combines the social-ecological transformation of the economy with the struggle for higher wages, meaningful labor, more leisure time and social welfare, renewable energy transition and the right to movement, access to mobility, and first-class public infrastructure for all. We definitively understand that such societal changes do not materialize through a “deal.” They can only be the outcome of social confrontations and struggles, in which different (class) forces fight it out.

A left Green New Deal and the argument for a social-ecological system change can become a project of hope in times of uncertainty and crisscrossing crises. A majority of people in Germany want to fight against social inequalities; they want politicians to do more for the social welfare of ordinary people, so that they are not robbed of their work and life savings in the event of illness or old age. A majority want decisive action on climate change. Even if most people do not question capitalism as a whole, the awareness that health-care, education, and housing should not be subordinated to the interests of profit has deeply entered mass consciousness.

### **A Transnational Project of the Left**

The good news is that in some countries a movement for social and ecological system change is already underway. A transnational left-wing project for hope can take shape. In the United States, movements are mobilizing, supported by left-wing politicians like Bernie Sanders and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez who endorse such bills as Medicare for All and a \$15-per-hour minimum wage, as well as campaigns for a just transition from fossil fuels and massive investments in

alternative energy and defunding the prison-industrial complex—in short, the right to dignified, safe, meaningful, and collectively self-determined living. Millions of new, well-paid jobs will be created by the transformative economic investment program that the Green New Deal agenda calls for.

In 2019, the British Labour Party won nearly a third of the electorate for a Green New Deal (or a “green industrial revolution”) with an ambitious program that combines social-ecological transformation alongside the regulation of labor and a comprehensive program for the restructuring of public property and economic democracy. We ought to take into consideration the starting points and the positions of different countries within the global division of labor. In Great Britain, a Green New Deal will be formulated under the conditions of advanced deindustrialization. In turn, Germany, as a “world export master,” needs to answer when it comes to the problems of the deindustrialized countries.

Even if, in the end, Bernie Sanders and Jeremy Corbyn didn’t win their elections, their success remains. “Ordinary people” have had their social ideas broadly expanded through the space created by these politicians’ campaigns and movements. In the United States, a socialist left anchored in society is forming anew. For many Americans, this movement is now a realistic alternative. It is unclear whether the left in the United States and Great Britain will grow further in the coming years, building social power in order to bring about a fundamental change. But there is hope. Left-wing parties and movements are demanding a social-ecological system change in France, Ireland, Portugal, Spain, Scandinavia, and many other countries. After decades of the left being on the defensive, we have the historic chance to put the perspective of a social system that crosses borders back on the agenda—if we manage to build new forms of international cooperation and networking and forge a real national and transnational movement and power.



## The Argument for a Green New Deal

In Germany, we invite other advocates of social justice and climate protection to join forces. Our proposal and political projects for a Green New Deal from the left, from the movements, from below, is an agenda to arrive at a climate-neutral economy and a more just and equal society within fifteen years. We can only avert the neoliberal and right-wing forces from pitching climate protection in opposition to social welfare agendas if we do so jointly. Key parts of the climate movement, whether Fridays for Future (the global climate strike movement begun in 2018) or environmental organizations like the BUND (Friends of the Earth Germany, a grassroots NGO), are devoting more and more time to these social questions. The concept of a social-ecological system change can come to the fore of societal conflicts if it is able to unite different social movements and political actors: the climate movement, tenant initiatives, trade unions, feminist movements, struggles of the unemployed, associations for social assistance and solidarity, refugee and human rights movements—and the Left Party, DIE LINKE.

A system change along social and ecological lines needs the will, knowledge, and creativity of the many who want change, a change that has to be realized against the power and the resistance of the few, the profiteers of the neoliberal order. There is more at stake than a collection of proposals for political discussion. This is about a social and political project, requiring from us not just convincing the majority of people. We also have to build with the people the “collective will,” of which Antonio Gramsci spoke (in his book, *The Modern Prince*), to actually change something; we have to encourage us all to change our lives and become active for a radical social transformation. Ideas, Marx wrote, become a “material force” when they reach the heads and hearts of people.

Our argument for a social-ecological system change, a left Green New Deal, comprises many elements, which can be taken as component parts of a new social project:

1. Building up the social infrastructure for better living for the many, not the few.
2. Meaningful labor and wages that suffice for a good life.
3. Social well-being and security for all by strengthening and democratizing the structures of the welfare state.
4. The radical protection of the climate and the ecological transformation of industry (with conversion of climate-destroying industries), which will connect to guaranteed employment and income, and more democratic control of the economy. Far-reaching disarmament and a conversion of the weapons industry are included in this.
5. Redistribution of income and wealth concerning a social system of just distribution and the creation of new forms of property.

We will delve into each of these elements in the following chapters.

## A Left Green New Deal

### INFRASTRUCTURE SOCIALISM AND CLIMATE-NEUTRAL CITIES

**W**e want society and its social infrastructure to line up with the common good instead of private profit. The left Green New Deal puts an end to the era of the privatization of public property and cutbacks to infrastructure. The left Green New Deal is the “concrete utopia” (to borrow a concept from the philosopher Ernst Bloch) of a real social infrastructure, in contrast with profit-driven clinics and unaffordable housing. The new welfare model involves a reappropriation of the essential social infrastructure, through the many—a democratization in the strongest sense. Such an infrastructure takes away the cares of life from capitalist competition, private shareholders, and corporations and instead builds another, more democratic, economic structure. The sociologist Wolfgang Streeck referred in 2019 to these sectors and industries as “foundational economies”: the “more they contribute to social well-being, the less they are organized and function according to capitalistic principles.” They bring “a society of equal citizens together . . . for the purpose of greater household productivity as well as humane ends themselves” (Streeck, 2019).

Although it could be argued that a “foundational economy” is also in the interests of sections of capital, it cannot be set up without conflict and without major social confrontations. A reappropriation by the many will not succeed

without resistance. It can only succeed if it is organized; that is, if people in society who want this foundational revolution get organized and rally together. Public goods are no add-on of the economy; they are at the center of a stronger and regionally directed economy. Wherever there is a clear lack of social housing, or the creation of carbon-neutral buses and rail (which are necessary for ecological transport), or shortages in medical care, public or community organizations can be built. A stronger social economy can then be formed, oriented to the needs of the people and providing good working conditions and income.

Social infrastructure built on people's right to material necessities means that more staff will be needed at kindergartens and schools, better quality healthcare, and an expansion of public transport and rail schedules, all for administration by close-knit citizenship and high-performing public and community organizations. With the realization of shortened labor-time, over two million new workplaces can be created in the next few years. These advances can be achieved through a reorientation of workers—young workers in particular. They will fill the dreams of coming generations of graduates with hope for their futures in booming social sectors. The precondition is that the relevant essential social labor will also be appropriately carried out and that the wage gap between industry and social sectors be closed.

### **Democratic and Oriented to Needs**

A social-ecological policy of common goods goes further than “good old” public service, which was, decades ago, an important victory for the workers’ movement. Public service, after a long, drawn-out neoliberal ideological offensive, calling it “inefficient,” “slow,” and “expensive,” was broken up and partly thrown onto the market. The public service of the 1960s and 1970s was hardly a needs-oriented or com-

prehensively democratic experience. Often it was about the preparation of young people for a life of wage labor, limiting their life prospects. For instance, the education system that reproduces rather than offsets class divisions—and the regulation of human needs to the exigencies of Fordism and its societal manifestations. The infrastructure for a better life requires more democracy in the common formation of public life. Communal and cooperative property should be co-controlled and co-designed through the initiatives of both employees and citizens.

Solidarity and climate-neutral municipalities could be made possible by social infrastructure, creating places for the care of life: health, transport, education, energy, and food. “A city for all—the Commune in the emphatic sense—delivers all the collective goods of freedom that are as fundamental for a fear-free individual as also for common development” (Candeias 2020) The necessary foundation is funding that is needs-oriented. Local democracy, to be revived, must be freed from the shackles of debt and the lack of management.

### **Instead of Austerity and Privatization: A Decade of Investments**

If we remain stuck in neoliberalism, debates over the cost of healthcare and care for the elderly infrastructure will increasingly predominate. Our society is aging, and at the same time companies are being let off the hook in terms of paying their share of supporting taxes. The left Green New Deal wants to create a new social and ecological model of welfare through a decade of investment in social infrastructure and a climate-neutral economy. Such a project would have the needs of people, the common good, and the new commons at its center. In Germany alone, in order to introduce far-reaching social and ecological renovation of the economy and infrastructure rapidly, investments of at least 1.5 to 2 trillion euros

over a period of ten to fifteen years are necessary. Therefore, we demand yearly investment of at least 130 billion euros in social infrastructure and climate protection.

Without investments higher than 13 billion annually, the two-tiered system of class segregation in health and aged care will become more brutal. People are already being treated and cared for in very different ways. It belongs to the evil paradox of the healthcare system of flat-rate payments that private patients without knee or hip or spine problems will be operated on so that money will keep flowing to “economically” run clinics.

Isolation among older people has assumed extraordinary dimensions, a measure of the inhumanity of our society. Older people are left in subhuman conditions in run-down aged-care facilities, or they are insufficiently cared for and isolated in their own homes. Women in these families make up for the shortfalls to the detriment of their own happiness. Aging people and people with physical handicaps need more than basic care; they need affection, time, and human intimacy.

If we draw one lesson from the COVID-19 pandemic: privatized healthcare, aged-care homes, and nursing services must be locally oriented and brought into public hands, financed according to needs and not to competition-oriented flat-rate systems. In the arena of care and assistance alone, three hundred thousand jobs are needed in the medium term, with shortened work hours (thirty-hour workweek). Care and assistance, professions in therapy, visiting services, and social work must be increased and better paid. Thus, even in an aging society, can infrastructure close to home and oriented to different life conditions be created, providing for a better life for all. So that it can be organized nearer to the people, the local healthcare infrastructure should be designed by the workers of various health professions, as well as by family members and those touched by problems working in care and health councils.

To line up with the needs of people and place their development at the center would also mean planning social housing to safeguard real needs within families. The social housing projects of the 1960s took many people out of badly heated and damp older housing and placed them in flats with rooms corresponding to the model of father-mother-child (on average 1.6 children at the time), thus standardizing the family model of Fordism of the time. Today we need housing communities and municipal housing associations made on a more realistic democratic basis by tenants and collectives, which will show how far superior these solutions are to the housing market with its tendency to edge people out, gentrify, and destroy already existing neighborhoods and city districts. Investments of over 10 billion euros annually are needed for this (half of which from federal and state coffers), plus three billion per year for a funding program for socially just energy modernization and ecological construction. In that way, 250,000 new apartment buildings and over 130,000 low-cost houses can be created in municipal, co-operative, and common use per year. These would be ecologically constructed and energy efficient. Return-oriented real estate companies like Vonovia or Deutsche Wohnen will never make social and solidarity cities. But the socialization of large real estate groups is an important entry project for a left Green New Deal. In the struggle for a nationwide rent cap, for instance, we can learn from the experience of the center-left government in Berlin, which, pressured by DIE LINKE and a radical and well-organized renters movement, implemented a rent cap.

A further entry project would be “ticketless” local public transport. Bound up with this would be the extension of public transport as a step toward a genuine transport revolution, with affordable, safe, and climate-friendly mobility unencumbered by cars. Ticketless municipal and public transport must receive substantial support from the federal state, and

workers in bus and rail must be better paid. The estimated cost of such a system would be about 8 billion euros.

This system could also be the foundation of the social-ecological renovation of industry. We need new forms of democratic control over research and development to bring forth socially meaningful innovations and modernizations of industry. Industrial politics must be reoriented toward clear and binding criteria for better working conditions and wages, as well as climate-neutral production processes. A social-ecological conversion of industry, especially in small and medium-sized regional enterprises, as well as new forms of production cooperatives, can be promoted by our national fund for transformation, which will involve about 20 billion euros in funds for conversion, to be managed by regional economic councils, environmental groups, and the climate movement. This can be financed with long-term and zero-interest state credit.

But that's not all. We want the energy revolution, with 100 percent climate-neutral energy, by 2035, with investments of at least 13 billion euros annually. The construction of renewable energy must be massively pushed forward in public, municipal, or cooperative hands, with socially varied prices and plain allowances for an energy supply for all. In order to avoid going above the 1.5-degree target, we need a transition away from coal by 2030 at the latest.

We want good education for all and therefore investment in schools and university facilities and equipment, more teachers and educators, an extension of free childcare centers with more workers, and full daycare, additional student spaces with lecture theaters and seminar rooms, all of which, according to estimates, would cost 58 billion euros per year. Beginning with structurally weaker and rural areas, where there is little or no connectivity at all, we want fast Internet that would cost 10 billion euros per year. And we must finally free up the municipalities so they have room to act



and can implement more staff in building oversight, labor, and environmental protections—15 billion euros annually. There is an investment bottleneck in the East of Germany, especially.

This all seems more like a socialist pipe dream than concrete realpolitik. But already, in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, we are seeing what kind of massive investment programs are possible to save the economy. Whether there is social conflict over the use and application of all this money depends on us and our capacity to change the political balance of forces. Will these forces be motivated to revive an economic model and mode of life that is already wracked by multiple crises, or will there be a fundamental change in direction?

The destructive effects of the last three decades of neoliberal policies in public infrastructure shape everyday experiences. There are schools without roofs and toilets, closed libraries and swimming pools, bridges teetering on the brink of collapse—all behind the innocent words “investment backlog.” Whole regions are economically depressed. These realities have led to a change in public consciousness, in which a majority favors more investment in public hospitals and better paid social work. This opens possibilities of concrete struggles and debates, and raises the chance to push forward a major project for a better future.

#### LIVING WAGE AND MEANINGFUL LABOR FOR ALL

Germany’s “job miracle” after the 2008–2009 world economic crisis is celebrated by the government and the media. But most of the new jobs are mini-jobs, casual or part-time, with few hours. One cannot live well on these jobs. Half of the employees and self-employed in Germany barely make ends meet, despite their hard work. Because of digitalization and the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic,

there is now the threat that many more employees will be dragged into precarity. We are indeed quite far from meaningful labor for all with the possibility of both personal development and collective influence on organizations and conditions of work.

Understandably, millions of people in Germany hope for better wages and job conditions. They want less stress on the job and working hours that permit them to live well with their family and friends, and time for volunteer pursuits. It is time to organize the world of labor anew. No matter whether someone works in a blue collar or a hospital gown; with a cleaning mop or a secure laptop, plan-able, better paid, socially secured, self-determined—socially as well as ecologically—meaningful labor for all is a necessity. People need work that is centered around the needs of whole lives, with more free time, in order to live this life with joy. These are the elements of the “new normal,” for which we struggle.

### **Just Distribution**

Our societal wealth is based on the work and knowledge of people. But in neoliberal financialized capitalism, only a few—the owners and stockholders of banks and big business—benefit from it. These few form a parallel society of less than one percent of the population who are able to live off their wealth. The wealth of the twenty-five richest families in Germany—from the founder of Lidl (retail chain), Schwarz (fourth largest retailer in the world), and the Albrecht (grocery magnate) families, to the clans owning Porsche, BMW, and Daimler, to the SAP (software company) founders Hopp and Plattner—is so huge that it goes completely beyond anything we can imagine. The richest forty-five households own as much as the poorest half of the population put together.

Needless to say, incomes are also unequally distributed. The monthly, full-time average (mean) gross income of an

employee in Germany in 2019 was 3,994 euros (\$4,473). That doesn't sound so bad, but three-quarters of all employees earn less than the available average. While the one percent of top-earners—among whom are managers, doctors, and lawyers—often reaches about 6,000 euros per month (for some, income reaches millions per month), the other half of employees are compelled to make do with less than 1,869 euros per month.

In virtually no other European country are people in the service sector paid as badly as in Germany. But even in the industrial sector, millions of precariously employed workers and employees in small and medium-sized businesses receive less than the average income. Though a university degree greatly increases opportunities for an above-average income, there is a growing number of academics who work precariously and earn less than their parents' generation.

On average, women continue to earn 20 percent less than men. Throughout their lifetimes, this gap will grow to over 30 percent, since women undertake the majority of unpaid care work in their families and relationships, often work in part-time jobs, and their professions are restricted by child rearing. Single parents and older women belong to the poorest sections of society. On a daily basis, female workers, especially in the service sector, experience the double- and triple-burden of low wages. Their work, so essential and valuable to society, is barely recognized. The COVID-19 crisis has created conditions for widespread public focus and popular consciousness, but has not brought improved lives for those affected. It is out of this contradiction, however, where struggle and hope can emerge.

The goal of a left Green New Deal is for those who, by their own labor, create social wealth and maintain society's functioning on a day-to-day basis to have hope for a better life. To win that, wage differentials must be overcome, for instance, through capping the wages of managers and

establishing higher wages for the “lower end” of the scale, along with equal pay for women and men.

### **Essential Workers: Equal Pay for Equally Valued Work**

Throughout the COVID-19 crisis there has been a lot of talk about the “system-relevant professions” or “essential workers”: nursing and health professionals, childcare workers, retail and cleaning workers, truckers, post office workers, logistics employees, firefighters and police, rubbish collectors and street cleaners, water and electricity personnel, to name only a few. It has become clear during the crisis just how much we are dependent on their labor. Their working conditions are often stressful, a result of the lack of personnel and flexible hours. On the whole, the pay is paltry. That these employees could suddenly be referred to as “system-relevant” or “essential” is bittersweet: they’re meant to “sacrifice” themselves for society, but their working conditions and wages are basically left unchanged.

The German “export wonder” model—or “German miracle,” referring to Germany’s becoming a postwar global economic power—relies not only on low wages and massive work pressure in industry, but also on the systematic devaluation of work in the service sector. It is about time we end precarious labor, gender inequality, and structural racism that is disadvantaging migrants in the education system and the job market.

The below-average wages, paid to half the workforce, must increase. Wages for all workers must meet their costs of living. The minimum wage must be immediately increased to 13 euros per hour, without exception. The German federal government’s calculation for our 13-euro demand determined that below 13 euros per hour the elderly, even after decades of full-time work, are threatened by poverty due to low pensions. “Equal pay for equally valued work” means

that careers in the service industry, with the same training level, are no less valuable than careers in the auto industry or oil economy. Above all, women, who are the majority in social services, must be paid equally.

A left Green New Deal takes care that there are no second-class workers. Collective agreements must apply across the board and work for all employees in the service sectors/industries, strengthening the power of workers and trade unions to push through higher wages. Because precarious work contracts (those on offer to precarious workers, typically without minimum time guarantees, benefits, or decent wages) contribute to wage dumping (substituting cheaper temporary workers for full-time, more expensive workers), we want to end temporary work. As a first step, temporary workers should receive the same wages as permanent workers, plus a flexibility allowance of 10 percent. Fixed-term and contract work will be limited to a few actual exceptions. The collective agreements of the core companies must be valid for all temporary contractors and for all workers employed through agencies and subcontractors.

### **A Shorter Work Week**

Contrary to what they would prefer, many retail workers or cleaning staff receive only mini-jobs or 15-hour contracts. Single parents often can't work other than part-time jobs. At the same time, as a questionnaire instigated by the left fraction of the Bundestag has shown, many workers are assigned regular 48-hour weeks. Over the course of 2019, employees have worked nearly two billion hours of overtime, half of which was unpaid. Lack of staffing and gnawing stress have become the norm in many fields. Accordingly, many people are reducing their working hours toward the 30-hour week. But part-time work often leads, in the prevailing order of things, to poverty in old age. Those who earn barely above

the minimum wage, and have to pay for rising rents, cannot easily afford to reduce their work hours.

Regardless of disparities and separations in working conditions, job stress and exhaustion have long been a theme joining together the most diverse workers. For example, trade unions, after defeats over shorter hours (or their extension), did not expect the hour-issue to mobilize people. But that's changed over the past few years. In the collective bargaining rounds of the Metal Workers Union (IG Metall), 1.5 million workers struck for "working hours that fit with life." The tram and rail union EVG and the service sector union ver.di (Verdi) could also score victories in new collective agreements, which facilitate shorter working hours that are self-determined.

The struggle over the workday is also a struggle over the future of labor and society. What does the future bring? "More precarious work and more stress"?—or "work that fits with our lives"? Labor is so productive and our society so rich, that a new relationship between labor and life is possible. Instead of entire lives consumed by jobs, work could have long ago turned to revolve around life, with higher wages and shorter hours determined by workers.

Time is overripe for shorter work hours, between 28 and 35 hours per week, self-determined by all. This should become a new norm, orienting legal frameworks and collective bargaining. It doesn't matter whether people work at Amazon or in the postal service, the hospital or in aged care, in an office or factory. Almost everyone is experiencing stress and greater pressure to perform. We must turn this problem into social conflict.

The public sector, along with highly productive fields such as the metal industry, could lead the fight for the shortened workweek with necessary wages and workers' compensation. The "Green Industrial Revolution" of the British Labour Party, for example, includes plans to reduce the workweek

every year at full pay until, in about ten years the 32-hour workweek becomes a reality for all.

In Germany, we are putting forth this argument: all workers are to immediately receive the right to a minimum number of 22 hours per week in their work contract, while the maximum workweek is to be restricted from the current 48 hours to forty. With an “Elective Working Hours Act,” all workers would have the right to determine their own hours, within a window of between 22 and 35 hours, and to decrease or increase hours on their own time schedule. Workers would also be entitled to claim a temporary respite of weekly working hours up to a maximum of 50 percent of the hours collectively agreed upon, or a leave of one year (sabbatical) with a guaranteed return to original working hours. Instead of drawn-out struggles that, over time, increasingly individualize an issue, this kind of law would demand a collective solution through “enterprise-elective working hours agreements.”

Especially in times of economic and social crisis, the right to further education and qualification during paid working hours is all the more needed. In fact, time for further education should become a fixed part of the labor relationship, so that the issue of qualification—acquiring degrees, gaining professional and personal skills—turns from an individual question to a collective social right and necessity, secured and paid for everyone. Qualification would, particularly in the course of social and economic crises, open the road to new careers, new perspectives; it would make possible new patterns of everyday life and new ways of living. This ought to be a project for the future, instead of being a mere condition of existence of the labor power. Qualification must be a collective, socially safeguarded task. Further education should not be confined to narrow, short-term business interests of companies; there needs to be a perspective of social development. Within the framework of the transformation of the auto industry, for instance, universities could offer places to

those workers without a high school certificate for free and innovative education. Universities could receive a training income. If we think about the degree to which universities work and do research for companies, their best potential and resources would lie in the hands of the workers.

The “Labor that fits with our lives” index:

- Wages that provide for a good life: a minimum wage of 13 euros an hour as a step into general collective bargaining contracts for all.
- Equal wages for equal labor. Value the services professions and care work.
- Abolish precarious work. Ban temporary work.
- Thirty-hour workweek with flexible, self-determined patterns and equivalent wages.
- More staff instead of constant stress: strengthen the collective codetermination of working hours and issues of labor organization. Have the right to veto stressful conditions and overtime hours.

#### DEMOCRATIC WELFARE STATE AND SOCIAL INFRASTRUCTURE

The welfare state isn’t a charity. And it isn’t there for the needy alone. It is the expression of the power relations between capital and labor, between poverty and wealth. Many historical struggles have gone into it. Long ago, arch-conservative statesman Bismarck wanted to stop the power of the German socialist workers’ movement with the first social laws. Today’s welfare state includes worker-paid health and work insurance, as well as a state pension system. These programs impact the lives of all people, even if they are bound to the system in various ways. We want to strengthen and renew this welfare state, expanding it to a collective social infrastructure.

Historically, the feeling of coherence in belonging and



being bound to a social collective structure has been provided by the experience of the centralized welfare state. Neo-liberal attacks aim precisely at this experience: “There is no such thing as society”; in fact, there is no “society,” was one of Margaret Thatcher’s most infamous sentences. The fact that people today have less of a sense of a common, shared reality is because the real structures of unity are being deconstructed, from the top down. People experience that guaranteed social security has become inconsistent. A majority of the population is not properly protected against illnesses, workplace accidents, and incapacity for work, care needs, and unemployment. They could fall into poverty and lose their hard-earned living standards. For workers in low wage sectors, precarious workers and the unemployed, this has long been the everyday case, and it throws many into chronic insecurity and the constant struggle to survive.

A strengthening of the welfare state, just distribution, and democratic control, a social security system, and an infrastructure run by the people are a project of democratic and social renewal of our society.

### **Attacks on Welfare State Injure Human Dignity**

It’s been fifteen years since the Red-Green Schröder government imposed its 2010 neoliberal agenda, which was the most serious attack on the German democratic welfare state since the post-Second World War period. During this time, it has become clear that this draining of the welfare state injures human dignity, destroys social cohesion, and threatens democracy. It spreads the soil for the establishment of the right-wing populist Alternative for Germany (AfD). Despite all this, solidarity and the welfare state are firmly part of the everyday consciousness of a great part of the population. Most people in Germany hope that the state does more for the social security of all. But the neoliberal unleashing of

competition, the anxiety of social collapse, and the counterposing of the supposedly secure “middle class” against people who receive social benefits have left their traces.

The welfare state must be fought for by the workers’ movement and the women’s movement, by trade unions, social democrats, and socialists. It has become one of the important social foundations of democracy and was one of the class compromises after the Second World War. This has been hollowed out since the 1980s by the neoliberal counter-revolution. In the coming years, threatened with economic stagnation and crises, upheavals in industry and digitalization, consequences of the climate crisis, and further demographic development, the struggle over distribution will sharpen. That’s not because we are heading toward a time of scarcity and lack; every single year, prosperity, knowledge, and wealth *grow*.

Notwithstanding the economic nosedive triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic, the objective conditions at hand indicate that all people could be protected against risks to life and capitalist society. But the dynamics of financial market capitalism bound up with these conditions have grown enormously, and the transnationally organized power of multi-billionaires and financial funds have shifted power relations. With the attacks on the welfare state, the social foundations of democracy have also become brittle.

### **A Good Life and Democratic Rights for All**

In current political conjecture, it is disputed whether the welfare state of the future should ensure a good living standard, social participation, and democratic rights for all those living here or whether it should be restricted to a minimum income against poverty. One hears arguments in the latter direction not only from the Christian Democratic Union of Germany (CDU) but also parts of the Greens. An actual minimum of

social security against poverty in old age, social decay, and regulation through Hartz IV financial assistance is unimaginable for many people today. But a minimum income alone risks degenerating over time into a state-charity alms for the poor. The COVID-19 crisis is presently being used to put into question even the inadequate basic pension that the Grand Coalition between CDU and the Social Democratic Party (SPD) introduced in recent years.

The principle of a democratic welfare state is quite special. It is about social guarantees for a good standard of living and social security for all. It is about justice and indivisible solidarity including all people, those who live here as well as those who come here. It is about greater justice in the distribution of work and social wealth. If we surrender better living standards and distributive justice as the welfare state's core principles, it would mean giving up the foundational basis of a democratic society: the redistribution of the producers' wealth from the workers to the owners of capital, in which financial market capitalism endures, with catastrophic consequences for society.

### **A Stronger Welfare State as Part of a Social and Ecological System Change**

Our proposal for a left Green New Deal aims to strengthen the democratic welfare state as part of a social and ecological system change, as well as widening its basis, so that a good living standard and social well-being are made possible for all. The foundation for this is the transformation of the world of work and a major redistribution of wealth between wages and profits.

The French sociologist Robert Castel believes an institutionally guaranteed right to "social property" would facilitate secure and safe life planning for all people within a democratically regulated laboring society of citizens with full and

equal social rights. Our proposal for the renewal of the welfare state ties into the idea of social property and simultaneously widens it.

The core of this project are universal social rights and guarantees alongside the *social infrastructure* that makes possible a better life for all, social participation, and access to a new quality of social services. These should protect all people from poverty, unemployment, and illness and maintain their living standards once they become old, or sick, and are unable to work or in need of care. Organized solidarity exists primarily in the social security system. The insurance of pensions, health, unemployment, and social benefits must be shaped by solidarity, and supplemented by tax-financed reimbursements that ensure social existence without any conditions attached. DIE LINKE has made the following propositions:

The state pension system must defend the living standards of the elderly and protect them from poverty, and the pension level should be raised to 53 percent. That would, on average, mean about 150 euros more per month for pensioners. A minimum pension of 1,200 euros per month represents the minimum social guarantee paid to all those who need it. With a solidarity supplement provided for low wages, phases of low income would, to some extent, be compensated in pensions. Women and citizens in East Germany would benefit most from this. Additionally, we want to expand the pension insurance system to a system of employment protection. Then all those in employment, including civil servants, freelancers, self-employed, managers, and politicians, would put money in. Whoever has an income of 10,000 euros or more per month should also pay contributions for 10,000 euros and more. As a perspective, all employees over sixty years of age should have the possibility of retiring—which is also a contribution to a more just distribution of wealth and labor.

The universal basic income, often presented as a solution

to the problems of precarity and social-ecological transformation, does not take into consideration the material foundations of social well-being: how is the socially necessary labor that is the basis of society, collective wealth, and democratic institutions organized and distributed in a just, equal, productive, and democratic way? The universal basic income, without any conditions, is a hazardous deadlock. To leave no doubt: this is not about questioning the unconditional procuring of existence. It is about a foundational principle of human rights and our social and socialist understanding of the world.

The unconditioned defense of existence is also central for the ability to fight in the approaching conflicts. The dissent is where the “universal basic income” is assumed to replace the user-pays system and to turn the logic of a socially just tax system upside down. Not because our tax system is worth protecting in itself, but if we had societal power to turn all of these systems on their heads, wouldn’t our utopia go far beyond the transfer of an individual, monthly amount of money? Our approach to “infrastructure socialism” means pushing the market and even money-mediated transactions more and more into the background and consolidating the structures of the (free) commons of society. Taxes should be paid by the wealthy and owners of capital, and they should be directed toward collective social infrastructures, not toward monthly flat-rate payments for everyone, regardless of income. Wealth should be redistributed by realizing the 30-hour workweek with flexibility for everyone according to their needs, instead of subsidizing meaningless low-wage jobs. A universal job guarantee and income protections in all periods of life are included within the framework of the Green New Deal. This includes the right to refuse a specific job in the event of temporary unemployment: nobody shall be coerced to accept a particular job against his or her will.

To secure the right of living without poverty, the dole must be paid out over a longer time period, for at least twenty-four months. Qualifications and further education must be free for all employees and must not count against the duration of the welfare receipt. We want to overcome the German workfare-system Hartz IV, through a “dole payment plus” and a *needs-based and punishment-free minimum payment of 1,200 euros per month*. This needs-based and punishment-free minimum income of 1,200 euros would shield all from poverty: everyone is entitled to it. The Asylum Seekers Benefit Act, with its discriminatory particular treatment, will be abolished and replaced by access to the needs-oriented minimum income. A children’s benefit of about 600 euros would defend the rights of the youngest. Job offers must accord with their qualifications and consider professional vocation and their interests in further education.

Instead of the two-class system of medical care, we want a solidarity-based health and long-term health insurance, in which we all pay, even the self-employed, freelancers, and civil servants. Every form of income is calculated in the accounts of the contribution. In this way, many more contributions to insurance would flow through and the “stronger shoulders” of the better-earning would be in solidarity with those who earn less but pay. The contributions for the insured majority would fall. Complete health insurance also means more and abundant nursing staff. Every individual health need, whether at home or in the care facilities, would be taken over without pushing the costs onto ordinary people.

To better juggle family and job, we demand twelve months of paid parental leave for each parent (twenty-four months for single parents), individual and nontransferable, until the child is seven years old. Parents must have the right to reduce their workweek with a compensation in payment.

## SOCIAL-ECOLOGICAL MOBILITY REVOLUTION AS A BEGINNING PROJECT

All great social transformations gain momentum if they are able to achieve pathbreaking changes in social conflicts. The mobility revolution is such a key conflict and a central “starting project” of a Green New Deal.

One of the main reasons that Germany doesn't achieve its climate targets is car traffic. The transport sector is the only sector to have increased its emissions since 1990. Traffic contributes over 18 percent of carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>) emissions. The necessity for a complete reroute is clear. The federal government's coronavirus stimulus package didn't meet the demands of the car industry and IG Metall for a bonus purchase of cars with internal combustion engines. One had the impression that all those involved were surprised by the continually bad polls for this core demand of the auto companies. In past years, IG Metall's diesel car emissions fraud scandal has cost society billions. But not a single satisfactory consequence has resulted. Still, the federal government continues to hand out billions in subsidies to the car companies: tax breaks for company cars that enhance the sale of expensive and high-horsepower SUVs and luxury sedans, subsidies for e-cars, regardless of size and ecological footprint. Subsidies for diesel, company car tax breaks, and many other environmentally destructive subsidies remain.

One hundred seventy times more investments flow into building new roads than rail kilometers. To save the environment, we must radically lower the CO<sub>2</sub> emissions in the transport sector. However, car manufacturers are holding on to car society with all their strength. For years, they have been putting off discontinuing combustion engines and have been blocking the necessary alteration to climate-friendly models, in order to push to the limit the profit

windfalls in diesel and petrol engines. Electronic mobility for buses, mini-buses, and low-horsepower cars can be an especially important contribution to a social-ecological mobility transition. But a purely technological change to electric cars is no solution to the environmental crisis. The extraordinary energy use in production, the growing need for rare earths and metals, land use, environmental damage, and road deaths from traffic accidents make for no road forward over the long term.

A decisive part of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions is created in production. In the case of electric vehicles, battery production is especially energy intensive. The carbon footprint depends largely on the size, weight, performance (HP), and apparatus (fully digitized interior). On the whole, a three-liter small car is less harmful to the environment than an electric SUV. The production of electronically operated SUVs and luxury cars is therefore a dead end. Electric cars are only meaningful if the electricity is derived fully from renewables. In Germany, according to current resolutions of the federal government, this would not be the case until 2040 at the earliest. A massive extension of electric mobility worldwide would sharpen the resource crisis. The production of batteries for electric cars is dependent on raw materials like lithium, cobalt, and nickel, which are becoming rarer. The production of lithium in Chile, Argentina, and Bolivia, of cobalt in the Congo takes place in environmentally destructive and exploitative conditions. There is no solution, as the Greens propose, in subsidizing the production of electric cars while simultaneously maintaining the dependence of German industry on the exports of luxury cars.

The time for a fundamental transformation in the organization of mobility, with equal access for all, is now. Surveys show that 48 percent of Germans would give up a car if there were reliable and cheaper alternatives. We want to create this. The mobility transition secures and creates jobs, even in the



auto industry. With a left Green New Deal in Germany, well-paid industrial jobs with a future could be secured over the next twenty years, and new ones generated.

**Mobility Infrastructure for the Future: Ecological and Connected,  
Affordable for All**

Transport must be thought of and planned according to the diverse needs and everyday requirements of people, instead of the profit interests of the car companies or the privatized rail corporations. Such a change brings more instead of less quality of life for people: faster and more comfortable journeys, car-free inner cities, more security (fewer deaths on the roads and fewer air pollutants), more free time and less stress. With a connected public transport and railway infrastructure and car-sharing, it can be guaranteed that transport needs are fulfilled and destinations reached in time. Within five years, we want to make the public transport system costless and to expand it massively, easier and barrier-free for all people.

We want to cut the railway ticket prices for regional and long-distance transport in half. Toward this, 9 billion euros per year will be poured into the expansion of rail infrastructure for better schedule times and punctuality, as well as better wages and working conditions for the rail staff, creating a citizens' railway oriented to the needs of people instead of profits.

The public transport system and a collective mobility infrastructure, including on-call buses, taxis, express bike paths, and publicly run car-sharing, must become, even in small towns, rural, and sparsely populated regions, a realistic alternative to the owner-driven car. We want to push forward and expand lending and sharing systems in public ownership that is community oriented and in cooperative hands. Better infrastructure will ensure that long commutes

and long distances to go shopping or reach doctors belong to the past. More regional economic activity is decisive for this, as well as better supply chains and infrastructure in rural spaces, and city and town planning that make short-distance travel feasible on an everyday basis. Ideally, this means less stress for all, especially for older people, families with kids, and commuters. Before 2025, most city centers would be car-free. The imposition of a stricter speed limit would create a better standard of living in the communes, and there would be fewer accidents and deaths on the roads.

If we bolster public investments in it, a rapid transformation of mobility is possible. Many jobs will be created in the sphere of rail and vehicle production. The precondition is that production capacities are ramped up and made permanent. Companies need secure planning. Where the productive capacities for building the transport infrastructure of the future are lacking, we want to establish public companies. That doesn't happen overnight. The knowledge and qualifications that have retreated from public administration have to be built anew. The core point is, instead of calling for individual sacrifice or drastic rises in the price of petrol, we create an attractive alternative. We strengthen public wealth and don't leave the public transport system to market forces.

### **Jobs and Climate Protection**

We want to transform the car industry radically, so that job cuts are avoided, even in the supply industries. It's possible, with an eye to the employee structure. In the next ten years, something like 150,000 workers in the car industry will go into retirement. A reduction of the workweek toward 30 hours, with wage-compensation in the auto and metal industries, would then secure employment. Our proposal is to combine this job- and income-guarantee for car industry workers with a social-ecological transformation in two

phases: an ecological renovation of the vehicles and the conversion to production necessary for the mobility transition.

The car industry is attractive to many workers because the work is comparatively well paid and highly organized along trade union lines. These are standards that must apply to newly created jobs, even in non-industrialized work sectors like personal services.

Vehicles that match collective mobility needs (energy-efficient electric cars, e-mini buses, e-buses, and new types of trams) make ecological and social sense and create the necessary planning, security, and jobs that will make, in twenty years, a secure future in the service sector (the public transport system, for instance, or maintenance) and in industry, through the massive construction of railways (including the building of rail infrastructure and trains) and a higher demand for buses and mini-buses. In this way, the loss of jobs as a result of both a reorientation to electric vehicles and the decline in exports, will be compensated by industry.

Aside from the recent concepts of structural transformation, we are not dealing with a “social mitigation” of the consequences of crises and the decisions of corporations but with a better future for workers in the industry: meaningful and secure work; wages that provide for a good life; less stress and more free time within the 30-hour workweek. These goals won’t be achieved within the framework of export-dependent production of electric cars, but only with social, ecological, and democratic conversions.

The state must force the car companies to follow a socially just and ecological path of transformation. This will only succeed if those in the workplace, the trade unions, the environmental groups, and the climate movement pool their forces. The major car companies like Daimler, Volkswagen, and BMW alone earned about 180 billion euros in 2019. Over that year, Daimler, Volkswagen, and BMW doled out billions of dividends to major shareholders like Piëch, Klatten, and

the sheikhs of Qatar. These finances must go instead toward climate-neutral renovation and job guarantees.

The switch to a medium-term conversion of the car industry should have already been set. The left Green New Deal begins with a clear principle: ecological conversion requires equitable transitions. Through a program of public investments financed by taxing the profits of major corporations and public credit, a viable future with well paid jobs and shorter full-time hours can be created.

### **Just Transitions: Jobs and Income Guarantee**

1. State subsidies for enterprises are bound to compliance with collective bargaining agreements, job and income protection, and the ecological transformation of production.
2. Reduction of work schedules with equal wages: gradual reduction of the maximum workweek of 40 hours (effective immediately) and, before the year 2030, 35 hours.
3. The right of further qualification for all who want to switch careers, change professions or drop their own job; the right of workers without a high school diploma to receive access to universities and technical colleges; of employees in industry who give up their jobs during the conversion to receive a qualification allowance throughout their further education equivalent to their salary; and the right to a job with equal qualification and adequate income.
4. Equal wages for equal work—so that wages in personal services approximate those of workers in core industries like car manufacturing, not the reverse. This makes work in healthcare, communal mobility, or environmental protection more attractive for industrial workers (and for young people choosing their careers) and enriches social services. Through investments in the social infrastructure

and ecological industrial production, millions of well-paid jobs in shorter-hour full-time work will be generated.

#### ECONOMIC DEMOCRACY AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF INDUSTRY

In the last few years, collective rights for workers' participation in workplace decision-making and elements of industrial democracy have been dismantled or cast aside. In many workplaces, there is no longer even a works council. This raises a fundamental question about the consideration of democracy:

Due to an ambiguous distinction between the public and the private, the power of ownership, thus the decisions over the means of production, investments, production processes, products or relocations are considered to belong to the private sphere alone. Companies that are so important for society in general are not understood as public institutions. Thus, in the political sphere, individuals are considered citizens with constitutional rights to a say over how things are ordered and can participate in the determination of the community. Yet in the world of work relationships of authority that destabilize existing cooperation are still present. Under competitive pressures and the shareholder value orientation of companies they have been strengthened over the past thirty years to the detriment of the dependent employees. (Allespach/Demirovic/Wentzel 2011: 80.)

#### **Democratic Enterprises and Social Property**

Enterprises should not be zones absent of democracy. The proposal for a left Green New Deal aims to push forward a debate and political conflict over the future of democracy,

expanding democracy toward the economy, while going beyond the classical method of participation in industrial relations. In all enterprises with over five hundred workers workers must be able to co-determine questions of relocations and layoffs and the shaping of working hours and personnel.

The profit margins of corporations must be used for social-ecological restructuring. Property relations that enable this are required. Therefore DAX (Deutscher Aktienindex, or German stock index) enterprises are to be democratized according to a three-part property structure and their business policy realigned: at least 21 percent public property, 30 percent employee ownership, and 49 percent private shareholders. This property relationship, joined to nation-wide collective bargaining, would make it possible to take a step toward the enforcement of a new weekly working time of 30 hours on full equivalent wages. This would not only enable a productivity advance but would also secure jobs in industries over the coming decades.

Democratic ownership can be the way forward for a more equitable distribution of social wealth. The British Labour Party has a fund for the development of workers' property: every year 1 percent of shares are transformed into workers' property; gains for private investors are curbed; up to 500 pounds per year are given from the funds to the workers, the rest turned toward state infrastructure investments. People's Policy Project, the think tank close to the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA), proposes a social fund instead of workers' property, so that all parts of society, even outside industrial capital, can share fairly in the wealth. Such ideas aren't new. The Meidner Plan in Sweden attempted, in the 1970s, to build collective property in the form of a fund. Our proposal for a left Green New Deal links up with this: dividends will be capped, those remaining would flow into a "solidarity, climate and infrastructure fund," able to

cross-finance cooperatives and shorten working hours in less profitable sectors.

New forms of democratic enterprises are necessary to ensure that innovations for social and ecological targets can take shape through the direct cooperation of workers and scientists and researchers beyond the pressure to make profits: for instance, state-funded and public research platforms or digital cooperatives as a new form of IT startup. The ambition is to further develop the “traditional” concept of cooperative and renew it according to the potentials of productivity development. Cooperative enterprises can become drivers of a new type of innovation for the whole of society. This would be a “solidarity sector for the future.” In a first step, we want to subsidize “startups oriented to the common good,” focusing on the development of ideas and knowledge for socially recognized services (for instance, in the quality of life for older people) or ecological innovations, supported by improved and more equitable legal frameworks.

### **Move Now to Set In Train the Democratization of the Economy**

Crises can open up new paths for the future. The heavy dependence of the German economy and industrial structure on car production proved itself to be a dead end in the 2008–2009 crisis. The companies want high returns on their holdings to the detriment of workers and society; they block climate protection and sustainable processes of transformation. The climate crisis, as well as conflicts over raw materials and markets, are therefore indicative of the urgent necessity for a foundational transformation of industrial policy and structures. Without a “social, ecological and democratic transformation” (Urban 2019; Demirovic 2018), massive job losses are on their way. Productive labor in industry is, however, a decisive foundation for a socially and climate-responsive welfare model of the future.

A conflict over the direction of society is therefore indispensable. Against the resistance of the powerful car corporations, a socially just transformation can only be enforced by a strong alliance of workers in the industry, based on their interests for meaningful work with good conditions, and with movements and social forces that push for climate protection. The federal government has chosen a different path with its 2020 economic stimulus package. It is financing the metal and car industry innovations and sales costs for electric cars and hydrogen technology, without intervening in the production structures themselves. It remains concentrated on individual mobility instead of, for instance, supporting rail and collective mobility.

Decision-making over the how and what of production needs to be appropriated by workers and society; decisions need to be taken democratically. A democracy such as this would need new processes and institutions. Labor sociologist Klaus Dörre speaks about a “transformative democracy,” in which cooperation and collective self-determination in companies is bolstered and combined with renewed participatory processes at a regional and national level. This goes far beyond a classical welfare-state model of policy: “In essence, it is about the redistribution of social wealth and, before all else, a new distribution of decision-making power in the economy, workplace and corporations. . . . Better than giving up on large SUVs is not to produce them in the first place. If their life-threatening drawbacks are taken into account, decisions about what, how and why to produce goods and services can no longer be left to small managerial elites in major corporations” (Dörre et al., 2020, 141). We naturally know that managers do not make decisions because of their own free volition, but follow the laws of the market, competition, and profit maximization. Economic democracy must go past the logic of business.

A glance back shows where we today can begin to look



for alternatives. At the high point of the global financial crisis of 2008–2009, car industries and mechanical manufacturing experienced a dramatic fall. The uncertainty for workers was inordinate. Even then, the federal government decided on rescue packages and stimulus programs. The former leader of the regional branch of IG Metall in Baden Württemberg, and member of DIE LINKE Sieghard Bender, who has unfortunately since passed away, proposed “regional economic councils for transformation” that decide the use of state and federal funding with the participation of employees, instead of decisions “from above.” These regional economic councils were made up of a third each of trade unions, municipalities, and employers’ associations. Theirs was the first proposal toward economic democracy for a long time, and met with approval among the trade unionists in mechanical engineering. Following the crisis, industrial production in Germany quickly resumed, however, and the proposal vanished.

We have to go one step further today. Regional economic councils cannot only arise from the representatives of enterprises, employees, and municipalities. We have to find a way to involve environmental and social groups, as well as regional movements and citizens’ initiatives. At the same time, we need to fight to make sure that they aren’t undermined by civil society “supplements” of companies.

Some object to economic democracy on the basis that most ordinary people lack the faculties for complex decision-making. They think elected parliaments are more suitable—especially highly paid managers who can rest on the expertise of their experts in bureaucratic administrations and corporate headquarters. Peter Altmaier, the current Minister of Economic Affairs, hinted that the state understands nothing about the decisions of companies, refusing to participate in Lufthansa’s strategy and policy for 9 billion euros of state bailouts. Quickly after this, the Lufthansa boss announced he wanted to cut 26,000 jobs.

In Stuttgart, the local council, the state government, and the managers of the railways decided to embark on a billions-euro project of a full transformation of the Stuttgart central station and the railway network, titled “Stuttgart21.” This corporative mega-investment project has let billions go up in smoke. It has damaged rail traffic instead of expanding it. The new station will be ready in 2025 at the earliest, as opposed to the projected 2021. The local residents have had to endure traffic jams, noise from construction, and constraints on public transport for years. A broad and impressive resistance movement against this emerged, and it continues today. Many “competence groups” took shape: architects, engineers, trade unionists. Some environmental initiatives, substitute traffic clubs, and rail enthusiasts popped up, deepened their knowledge, and became “experts.” Today, there is no question that their assessments and prognoses were more correct than the professional “experts.” Even the railway management would shy away from the project today. If these groups had been democratically integrated into the decision-making, the decisions would have been quite different.

### **Democratic Planning**

The left Green New Deal aims to make industry carbon neutral, energy efficient, and independent of exports by 2035. With declining air traffic and dwindling demand, new solutions are required. The arms industry is another story: a rapid and far-reaching conversion for it would be a requisite for human rights, peace policy, and climate protection. Industrial sectors that damage humans and the climate (environment-damaging plastics and chemical production belong there too) must be curtailed as widely as possible and production restructured—for example, toward medical equipment, e-buses and rail transportation, and energy-efficient mechanical engineering.

The social-ecological restructuring of industry is a mammoth task that can only be successful with complex knowledge, democratic cooperation, and effective democratic control over short- and long-term investments. The investments and production decisions of the major corporations like Daimler, Volkswagen, Bosch, Siemens, SAP, Bayer, leading the world market, have to be redirected toward ecological and social criteria. The industry must be brought into line with the key sectors of the future: IT, renewable energy, transport industry, medical technology, energy-raw materials, efficient mechanical engineering, and the steel industry. Long-term planning toward meaningful investment is only possible if the expectations of stockholders for short-term high returns retreat behind other considerations. Society must impel the DAX companies; now is the time to start the ecological conversion. A planned economy of the central state from above, as in real socialism, has failed, but the concept of a democratic planning framework in the economy is more relevant and more important than ever.

In large corporations as in the neoliberal state, elements of the “planned economy” are already present. Important innovations arise through state promotion and research networks, as the economist Mariana Mazzucato shows clearly (Mazzucato 2014). Social knowledge and cooperation are subsequently used privately and exclusively for the benefit of a handful of corporations and their shareholders.

We want democratic planning in the interests of people, toward social and ecological goals. The experiences and working conditions of people in different sectors of the economy and the social consequences of technological decisions must flow into the decision-making processes of the companies from day one. Socially and ecologically sensible innovations can only arise if public research and development is massively democratized and expanded.

Climate protection and economic policy must be further

intertwined and democratically organized. This requires an alternative set of power relations: new majorities in parliament and a government committed to social-ecological targets. That, in itself, is not enough, however. Our proposal ties the discussions around new economic democracy to the municipal and workplace-operative, regional, and national level (Urban 2019; Dörre/Schickert 2019; Detje/Sauer 2018; Demirovic 2018). We propose a national transformation and conversion council to work out a plan for the medium-term restructuring of industry and that controls its execution. This council should be made up of representatives of the different parties in the Bundestag, trade unions, environmental groups, and social and climate movements, alongside participation of scientists. A democratic framework of planning would include the participatory elements of direct democracy—not in referendums over details, but in discussions and surveys on important priorities, focal points, and questions of discord.

A democratic framework for planning is also necessary in the sectors that deliver life-maintaining services to many. For the essential supply of food, the agriculture and food industries, water and energy allocation, digital infrastructure, pharmaceutical industry, medical technology, transport, and aviation should not be dependent on the world market. This applies as well to the digital infrastructure, from the networks to social media platforms, and social knowledge. This involves software development for socially crucial sectors, which are largely privatized at present. These sectors must be aligned to the needs of an accessible social infrastructure and not to the interests of profit. The majority of corporations should therefore be moved to public ownership. Where it is more efficient, new public undertakings should be initiated.

The German constitution, the Grundgesetz, already stipulates that private property of companies has a duty toward the common good. Anchoring sustainability goals in Article

13(2)GG would widen social binding on property. It would enable socialization according to Article 15 of the Basic Law of major corporations that refuse to carry out necessary social-ecological restructuring.

### **Regional Economic Cycles for a Better Quality of Life**

Small and medium-sized businesses are very important for many regions. Comparatively good wages depend on them, indirect jobs in trade, services, and infrastructure, as well as generating tax revenues for municipalities. This is both a curse and a blessing. It makes the employees and their families, municipalities, and regions—over which they only have a small influence—highly dependent on the decisions companies make. Good work, a superior quality of life, and equal living conditions in all regions (as guaranteed by the Basic Law) are possible, if we secure Germany's future industrial structure and transform it simultaneously.

The road to a climate-neutral economy can be successfully navigated if we strengthen regional production and organize the economy in cycles, develop long-lasting products, massively expand repair and recycling, strengthen regional warehousing, and thwart unnecessary freight traffic.

Would that be the end of globalization? Not at all. The cycle of globalization won't allow itself to simply be rewound. The existing neoliberal globalization is driven by the profit margins of major corporations and financial markets, but this neoliberalism is quickly coming to its end. It is ecologically unviable, aggravates inequality, and leads to social disorders like deindustrialization, subordination to corporate decisions over which hardly anybody has a say, the theft of resources, and to the rebirth of authoritarian nationalism and new wars. Production chains are organized by corporations across the planet because production resources and wages are cheaper, and environmental standards are weaker

outside the centers. “Just-in-time” production, extremely flexible production based on fluctuating demand, is most often built on a fatal work pace, flexible working hours, precarious working conditions, and flexible logistics with low transport costs, high CO<sub>2</sub> emissions, and a waste of natural resources. The digitalization of production will exacerbate this development and increase energy depletion.

Instead, human rights, social, and environmental standards must be integrated into the global creation of value through universally applicable laws and a comprehensive set of state and social controls over production decisions and supply chains. This incorporates a stronger, regionally located structure of production in agriculture and food commerce, in industrial production, logistics, and recycling. Gene technology, fracking, or the new field of geoengineering have proven to be impasses. In other sectors like the steel industry, medical technology, vehicle construction in rail, chemical, and pharmaceutical industries, it is more a matter of national or European-wide structures. A socially and ecologically sustainable division of labor in industry can only be brought into play through democratic economic processes and democratic planning frameworks.

A big challenge is the lack or underdevelopment of necessary knowledge about alternative models of society. This lack can only be overcome by processes of democratization of knowledge, decision-making, and work. Such processes have to begin within existing structures and institutions, which they have to transform and move beyond.

Meaningful social and societal production can arise if the employees who know the technology and technological processes take control using their knowledge and experience to move further into the organization of production and company investment decisions.

## Employees as the Bearers of Change

Without the knowledge and experience of employees, nothing happens in the workplace. But the knowledge and collective labor of the employees continually butts up against the limits of management imperatives and the limits of property relations. They can barely influence investment decisions. In many companies, workers are asked to take over collective duty for the production process in the collective and other forms of work, bringing in experience, finding flexible and rapid solutions to problems. They don't have much influence over the conditions that determine stress and work pressures, the future of the company and its jobs, or questions as to what is created and for whom, and at whose expense. Only democracy can resolve this contradiction.

Klaus Dörre stresses how a left Green New Deal would mean a "revolution in sustainability." It enables and supports new paths for qualifications and professions with guides to transformation and "worker-engineers":

Those who are specifically trained "guides to transformation" who have operational experience at their disposal and gain more qualifications at technical colleges or universities could provide orientation. In general, the social-ecological transformation has a permanent need for further training. This is so for a great number of employees and because of this, companies in the future will have to have specialists who provide qualified support for the use of digital technology for the intelligent use of energy. It is clear that small and smaller businesses cannot employ experts like these on their own. Inter-company pools with specialists trained appropriately for the tasks will be

needed to shape the transformation. The industrial employee of the future could combine (as Burkart Lutz pointed out some years ago) being a skilled worker and engineer, the skilled worker-engineer. (Dörre et al. 2020, 137ff.)

Advanced training, research and development, concrete *know-how* for the reformation of production and services have become key questions that condition the future of workers in central economic sectors. They must be socially organized. The costs shouldn't be passed onto private individuals. Therefore, the left Green New Deal contains a comprehensive right to the free advance of skills and (further) education with full payment. Companies must pay the costs for this.

### **Social-Ecological Transformation Fund and Regional Economic Councils**

Many small and medium-sized businesses that want to transition to ecological methods and products, or are compelled to do so through crisis, lack the necessary know-how and capital. It is neither possible nor sensible that the many suppliers to the car industry that specialize in individual parts for internal combustion engines all make the switch to electric mobility (Dörre et al. 2020). A government fund dedicated to transformation with a 20 billion annual budget should support the necessary social-ecological restructuring in different branches of industry. In particular, in the supplier industries for cars—but also in the weapons industry, party of chemical, steel, and mechanical engineering industries—such a conversion of production processes and products is necessary and must be introduced. Funds for investment must be connected to job guarantees, good wages, and collective agreements. Government funds would only be given in return for ownership shares in public hands and the work-



force. Cooperatives and innovative collective startups ought to be systematically sponsored.

Regional economic councils should be able to co-decide about the money in the transformation fund. Representatives from state parliaments should make up for a third of them (members of parliament as well as experts and scientists sent by parliamentary committees), representatives from the Association of German Chambers of Industry and Commerce and the trade unions, as well as a social-ecological chamber made up of trade unions and works councils, and environmental and climate cooperatives. Experiences with erstwhile processes of citizen participation and advisory councils would flow into the specific structuring of the regional economic councils.

The great difficulty is to transform the operational conditions in such a way that those who are representing so-called civil society are democratically legitimate and accountable, and don't overshadow the regional businesses and party networks. One part of the representatives of the social-ecological chambers could be trade unionists and members of environmental and social associations, and the other could be representatives of civil society elected directly (in local municipal elections), so that minor citizens' initiatives and active social movements are democratically chosen and present on the council.

The regional economic councils must have funding and personnel at their disposal.

Publicly financed, trade union, environmental, and social-association-led regional social-ecological chambers are needed to advise business councils and companies and promote research, development, further training, and regional cooperation with companies and (technical) colleges. This may be capable of producing a counterweight to the informal networks between politics and corporate management over the long term.

If wider social discussions become more important and “normal,” this also points the way to a reorientation of the universities: to knowledge production accountable to social needs, in dialogue with society, instead of company-positioned research.

### **Index: Democracy in the Economy**

- Workers are to have veto rights and a say on all economic questions. All companies with over five hundred employees yield to the employees extensive rights of codetermination when it comes to relocation and job cuts, working hours, and personnel.
- Regional social and economic councils would develop perspectives for the regions themselves and direct the transition away from unsustainable industries. This applies to the coal regions as well as those places with a concentration of SUV production.
- Climate and infrastructure transformation funds: support cooperatives, worker-ownership, and social startups.
- National transformation and conversion council: works out a plan for the medium-term restructuring of industry, democratically controls its execution, and decides national proportions of funds for investment.

### **WHO PAYS FOR THE CRISIS?**

We are midstream in the greatest social struggle over distribution since the economic and financial crisis of 2008. As of June 2020, the federal government decided that the 156 billion euros of further government spent for coronavirus stimulus packages were to be compensated in twenty years’ time. The federal government proposes to take on more debt of 218.5 billion euros in 2020. In the end, the cost of this crisis will turn out even higher. Over the next few years, the

major social struggle will be whether we focus on austerity in terms of social services and privatization, putting off climate protection, or manage to steer a course out of the economic crisis toward a better future.

To begin the necessary ecological transformation of the economy rapidly enough and to propel it forward with decisiveness, investments of at least one to two trillion euros over a decade will be necessary in Germany alone (Fratscher et al. 2020). Our proposition for a left Green New Deal is on the same scale. These numbers are massive, difficult to imagine, and some would say even delusional or megalomaniac. But comparisons are helpful: the forty-five (!) richest households in Germany have private assets of over 200 billion euros. In 2014, the wealthiest *1 percent* of German homes already had more than 3.1 trillion euros in assets, and another 9 percent had assets of 2.9 trillion euros. It is therefore a question of class struggle: who will bear the burden of the cost of the crisis and the transformation of society and the economy?

It is currently a good sign of the times that, in Germany, not only DIE LINKE is demanding more taxes on the rich, in view of the hundreds of billions spent on the COVID pandemic. The SPD chairperson, Saskia Esken, proposed a one-off property levy, and the German Institute for Economic Research backs placing more of the burden on the rich for a COVID solidarity levy for high-end earners and a one-time property tax on those with high tax exemptions. DIE LINKE argues that taxation of a minimum of 10 percent be paid on large assets, which is scaled up: whoever has 50 million euros, for instance, would pay more on the last fifty million than the first taxable million. Trade unions, charities, environmental associations, and churches also see the need for a property levy. If these actors unite forces, a property levy could be implemented and would be an important first step to a fair financing of the crisis.

It is a simple matter that companies shouldn't profit from

subsidies, but simultaneously pay billions to shareholders in dividends. Denmark and France have stopped paying government subsidies to businesses that move their profits to tax havens, run front companies, or pass their profits on to shareholders. The German government has gone so far as to require corporations like Adidas or Lufthansa to decide between cheap loans from the state-owned development bank or dividend payments. Despite this, about three quarters of the 160 listed companies want to pay dividends this year. Corporations like Bayer, BASF, and car companies profit from short-term working cash and still deliver for their major shareholders as if nothing were amiss.

### **Tax the Multimillionaires**

The owners of the largest companies have become much wealthier in the past few decades. Their power threatens democracy and the future of life on the planet. Every billionaire is therefore also the result of a fatal policy failure, as U.S. Congressperson Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, the bearer of hope for a generation of young Americans, has said. She is right. The left Green New Deal gives a clear answer to the question about how social-ecological restructuring can be financed: the super-rich, the multimillionaires and billionaires, must finally be taxed honestly and fairly. But it shouldn't stop there. It is about a whole social system of distributional justice and the creation of a new form of property.

A millionaire's tax on all wealth above a million euros could yield 80 billion euros per year for the financing of the Green New Deal. In this way we don't forget social duty: the first million will not be touched by the millionaire tax. Nobody will become destitute because of it.

More is needed for an honest financing of a Green New Deal for example, upper limits on the highest earners. The social inequality in wage differentials has drastically soared

in recent years. Even if real wages have gradually risen, they remain far behind the rise of the highest earners. The top tax rate must be increased to fairly extend to the luxury earners. The economist Thomas Piketty has garnered wide support for his demand for an 80 percent tax on all income that is one thousand times the average (Piketty 2020). DIE LINKE calls for a 53 percent high-income tax on all those earning 70,000 euros annually. As a rule, whoever earns less than 7,100 euros per month is relieved, and the lower earners even more so. Average earners would be relieved in terms of income tax by 100 euros per month. And those who have a yearly income over one million euros would be permitted to invest 75 percent of the amount above the million mark in social justice. The income gap could be mended over time in this manner.

In the final analysis, a further capped limit is needed. In 2019, the Bundestag concluded that, in the future, the boardrooms of listed companies would be obliged to set upper limits for the income of managers. This ruling is a step in the right direction. But it is not sufficient. There must be binding upper limits, even outside ecological grounds, in order to push back destructive luxury consumption. The goal must be regulated so that when the incomes of the lowest 50 percent rise, nobody earns more than twenty times the fulltime wage of the lowest-earning group of a company. But, as with any demand, every step forward in the right direction is more important than a program.

This also pertains to the taxation of corporations. Through a higher corporate revenue tax and the struggle against tax-dodging and evasion, we want corporations to put more into the financing of public undertakings. Furthermore, we want a financial transaction tax that is, first of all, proposed to support the struggle against poverty and the climate crisis in poorer countries.

Many corporations and the rich park their wealth in

countries that practice tax dumping or impose no taxes at all, facilitating money laundering. The largest corporations' profits are transferred through accounting tricks or sham front companies in other countries. States lose tens of billions of tax revenue every year because of this. In Germany, over 18 billion euros has been smuggled into tax havens such as Luxembourg. An analysis carried out by the DIE LINKE fraction of the Bundestag showed that all thirty DAX-listed corporations operate through tax havens.

Tax havens need to be drained. Companies must therefore be compelled to make their profits, tax records, and payments transparent, according to each country. The real owners of front companies, dubious foundations, and funds can be revealed through public registers. If we implement a Green New Deal in powerful economic countries, steps toward another economy with common social, environmental, and tax standards can be taken, and ruinous competitive practices of dumping can be broken.

Last but not least, the principle of “the polluter-pays” has to apply to all. Anybody causing destruction must pay for it. This principle applies to many everyday life situations, and should be applied to economic affairs, too—in fact, more so here, because the great social and ecological damage caused by three decades of neoliberal policies allowed only a few entities to profit from it. Corporations and shareholders, not the workers by their wages, must pay for the investments needed to ecologically restructure industry. In 2019, Daimler, Volkswagen, and BMW handed out generous dividends to big shareholders: about 1 billion euros for the Porsche Piëch clan, about 300 million euros for the Qatari sheikhs, and the Quandt heirs took in about half of BMW's profit of 5 billion euros. Volkswagen CEO Diess raked in about 10 million euros, while other members of his board were endowed with about half of that. The three largest German car companies, Daimler, Volkswagen, and BMW, had earnings of about

180 billion euros in 2019. Despite this, they pleaded for state subsidies in the 2020 crisis.

A great portion of a socially just mobility revolution, including a shortening of work hours with wage compensation for employees throughout the industry, could be financed if the federal government ventured to seize companies' retained earnings and dividend handouts to big auto industry corporations and to limit managers' salaries. It would be far, far easier to redirect subsidies that wreck the environment—car, energy, coal, arms, and chemical companies get an amount of 55 billion annually! This pertains to arms spending too, since NATO requires the federal government to increase its military spending to 2 percent of GDP, which amounts to 75 billion euros per year. Back in 2014, the defense budget came to 32.4 billion. Even if we went back to this level of spending, 12 billion euros more would be there for annual investments in climate protection, healthcare, and education. A portion of the money should be put into global justice causes, such as the development of better healthcare in underdeveloped countries in the Global South and compensation for those who suffer the devastations of the climate crisis, for which the Global North is largely to blame.

### **No Return to Austerity and the Shackles on Debt!**

When Fridays for Future ramped up the pressure in 2019, the EU, from Merkel to Kramp-Karrenbauer and Merz, all agreed that the key to the future was the refusal to take on government debt: the “Black Zero” and the “Green Zero.” Even parts of the Greens, such as the Baden-Württembergische prime minister Kretschmann, defended a “Black Zero” over and over. However, the opposite is true and has been supported over and over by science (AG Alternative Economic Policy 2020; Fratzscher et al. 2020). The “Green Zero,” in the sense of a carbon-free economy and infrastructure, is impossible

so long as the “Black Zero” and the fetishistic debt shackles remain in place. Both are fetters on further investment that are needed to create a sustainable future!

The myth of a “dangerous government debt” continues to persist. This isn’t surprising. Since the 1980s, neoliberalism has been strenuously imposed in the business faculties of German universities, editorial offices of business journals, newspapers, and television. The notion that the state’s debts are shackles on future generations is a religious dogma, a popular prejudice, nothing more than a false belief. In the summer of 2019, Marcel Fratzscher, president of the (not far left) German Institute for Economic Research (DIW) made the plea for an investment program of 450 billion euros for the next fifteen years. From an economic and financial vantage point, maintaining the fetishistic debt burden makes no sense. Even taking inflation into account, we have lived for years in a context in which the state has only had to repay 90 cents (!) on every borrowed euro.

A left Green New Deal should make investments into the future possible. If we invest in infrastructure, digitalization, education, housing, healthcare, energy transition, and in affordable, climate-friendly transport in city and rural areas, people will benefit decades from now. Long-term investment in collective social infrastructure is also the decisive foundation for the welfare of our society. This investment would generate millions of meaningful jobs for structurally weak regions, which would then encourage economic demand, tax revenues, and social contributions. The effect: necessary projects will be refinanced by at least one half in the medium term.

### **Break the Power of Financial Markets and Renew Europe from Below**

Since the 2008 world economic crisis, financial markets have been propped up with cheap money from central banks. At



the same time, the healthcare systems of numerous countries have been torn to shreds under immense pressure from the European Union's requirements. How does that work? The explanation is clear: neoliberals and those with great fortunes care about keeping government spending on the welfare state and investments in social infrastructure at the minimum, while maintaining maximum competitive pressures at every level of the economy. Banks, financial funds, and corporations benefit. Instead of making financial market investors richer with state money, the financial markets must be disempowered, the casinos closed, and the banks placed under social controls. The European Central Bank (ECB) can finance a European Green New Deal program. Therefore, state financing must be decoupled from the financial markets and the ECB must finally be subject to the democratic decisions of the European Parliament.

However, neither the climate, nor the millions of people who depend on better infrastructure can wait until all the EU states, a majority in the EU Commission, and the Parliament decide to finance a Green New Deal. We can and must pave the way forward in Germany, breaking with austerity. The fetishistic fetter on debt must fall, and a social-ecological investment program must begin. If the economic and political tide turns in the most powerful countries of the European Union, something will move in Brussels and Strasbourg, too. But it remains a matter of struggle, on both terrains.

That the European Union's policies and institutions have been neoliberal from the outset is not a law of nature but rather the outcome of materialized power relations, the dominance of neoliberal actors, and the ideas that serve them. The decisive factor is the balance of power between labor and capital, and between states in the international competition for capital. In its present form, the European Union plays a major role for large corporations and banks. The aim of the dominant factions of the transnational bourgeoisie is

to make Europe the most competitive region in the world. In the past few decades, technocratic institutions have been developed to undercut the influence that democracy can have on economic frameworks and conditions. The European Parliament has little impact on this established framework, as compared to the EU Commission, the ECW, and the Council. The pressure on wages, social benchmarks, and public goods is solidified in European institutional structure and treaties. There are many examples of this: the powerful position and the functionality of the EU Commission gives major corporations direct access. The fetishistic debt fetter was written into the fiscal pact, and parliaments were demoted. The neoliberal construction of the Eurozone leads to ever-increasing pressure on the competitive nature of weaker economies; the European Central Bank operated outside real democratic controls. The Troika strangled Greece financially to impose austerity policies, smashing one of the most important left-wing projects of recent years.

As a result of the inner economic and political contradictions of the neoliberal structure, the prospect that the European Union will fall apart has become a real threat. If this happens, Europe would regress into a time of destructive nationalisms. Currently, a majority of Europeans want a Europe without borders and nationalism. The neoliberal powers try to bind this desire to their own project, in order to take the teeth out of any fundamental transformation of European conditions and relations. It is to be expected that, in the coming years, social cuts, the toleration of authoritarian regimes, increased spending for weapons, and the struggle over ever scarcer resources will continue.

Europe's future depends on whether or not we succeed in building a European movement for a social and ecological system change, a movement in which trade unions and left parties join forces and build pressure beyond national borders. This kind of movement for the social-ecological

and democratic renewal of Europe from below needs a unified platform, projects that can initiate alliances, and can be fought for at the national level.

Some core projects:

- We wish to go beyond precarious labor and mass unemployment, through a massive program of investments in climate-friendly and well-paid work.
- We want to free healthcare from the pressures of profit making, take hospitals back into public ownership, and strengthen them with more personnel.
- We need immediate investments in a transformation to renewable energy (a European coal phase out by 2030), into the expansion of a European rail network, and the transition to ecological agriculture.
- We want a Europe of solidarity, where all people living in Europe have equal rights and people who need help are welcomed. The inhumane regime of borders has to be abolished and replaced by migration laws that follow human rights and dignity for all.

With a socially just EU-wide taxation of the super-rich and corporations and gradual disarmament, a European directional change of course can be financed. For the long-term financing of investments in social infrastructure and ecological restructuring, democratic power over the ECB is necessary. Together with a debt moratorium, these reforms can contribute to the democratic seizing of EU power away from the financial markets and major corporations. We should think of a left Green New Deal as a medium-term strategy for the construction of power from below. To this end, we ought to forge a European network that is made up of the progressive forces in Great Britain and movements on every continent. The left has the possibility of bringing into play a new European project from below and becoming a

connective political actor that is more than the sum of the national parties and movements.

### **Who Bears the Costs of Inaction?**

Scientists think that every degree of global warming could cost up to an average of 1 percent of GDP by midcentury (Wallace-Wells 2019, 41). The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change estimated in 2018 that the negative economic consequences of global warming at 2 degrees would come to 69 trillion dollars (Klein 2019, 321). This estimation could be too conservative. “Global warming of 3.7 degrees Celsius would cause up to 551 trillion US dollars’ worth of damage. . . . If CO<sub>2</sub> emissions continue to rise as they are, the planet will be four degrees warmer in 2100” (Wallace-Wells 2019,41).

The dramatic human consequences and the economic costs of droughts and water scarcity, brushfires and storm surges, the flights of refugees, and resource wars are tough to calculate. “If emissions aren’t dramatically reduced, Southern Europe will have a permanent desert in 2080.” Air pollution from fine particles and rising CO<sub>2</sub> already costs tens of thousands of human lives every year. Wallace-Wells writes about the outlook for the end of the century, if we should fail to remain within the 1.5-degree target: “The extent of the economic destruction can hardly be imagined. One could begin by imagining the world as it is but with the economy cut in half. . . . That means the idea of relying exclusively on the growth of technology to solve problems seems like an absurd idea” (Wallace-Wells 2017).

Yet the federal government and most of its imaginary “economic wisdom” continue to deny reality. We must not forget that the costs of inaction are much greater than the costs of the necessary social-ecological renovation of the economy and infrastructure. If we don’t fundamentally

change societal power relations, these costs will fall to the majority of people, not to the small minority of the rich who will strain to hold on to their privileged societies for as long as possible.

### **Green New Deal for Global Justice?**

The left Green New Deal is mainly a project stemming from the Global North, formulating a perspective for a left-wing social-ecological policy under the economic and political conditions of the richest Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) states. We cannot and should not easily transfer this to the rest of the world like a master plan, but we should learn from the social movements of the Global South, without simply repeating their proposals for ourselves. Essential approaches to climate justice, *buen vivir*, food sovereignty, and agricultural transition have been developed from experiences in the Global South. In this sense a left Green New Deal is a proposal for a new internationalism, which takes on crisis in global terms and begins from the necessary transformations of the rich societies of the Global North. With the perspective of a new, social-ecological welfare model, we can win majorities for a globally just transformation in the OECD countries.

But we should realistically acknowledge that a left Green New Deal is hardly possible under capitalist conditions. The global division of labor and dependency, differential productivity levels, and location competition block it. The obligation for us on the left in the Global North is to struggle for climate justice, the end of exploitation, and the transformation of power relations of globalization toward a socially and climatically just economy. That includes overcoming dependence on resource extraction and land grabbing in the Global South (so-called extractivism). On these grounds, too, a blind growth of energy and resource use in transport,

digitalization, and consumption can never be, as the liberal concept of green modernization assumes, a model for the future.

The left Green New Deal must be assessed, insofar as it succeeds, not only to introduce energy-efficient technologies but also to contribute “resource justice” in exports and imports, production and consumption. Our proposal for a new welfare model is therefore at the center of it all: if we transform and democratize distribution relations and the ways in which we produce and invest; if we push back destructive forms of production, shorten working hours, and expand social infrastructure, we can reach a kinder way of living, resource-wise.

Particularly in terms of the global economic crisis, we have to put pressure for debt relief for the countries at the peripheries and semi-peripheries of global capitalism that carry the burden of increasing debt and get blackmailed by financial creditors. Needed are a fair system of trade, as well as investments in global, socially and democratically organized (instead of corporate-organized) health infrastructure (see Medico International 2020). Our hope stands with the millions of people who struggle worldwide for a social-ecological transformation, in opposition to the consolidation and continuation of the capitalist economic order, with its catastrophic consequences for the majority of humanity.

### **Index: Convergences within a System Change Politics**

Between the concept for a Green New Deal of the left within and outside the Democratic Party in the United States, the Labour Party (developed by its former leaders Jeremy Corbyn and John McDonnell), and our approach is a wide range of agreements. But there are also diverging conceptions or differences in the weight of some elements. We have put

together some fundamental demands. They show some potential for convergence and alliances that a left Green New Deal might open up.

### **Labor's Green New Deal**

Create a million green jobs through energy transition, energy modernization, and the expansion of the healthcare system.

- A 32-hour workweek within ten years with equal wages.
- The nationalization of railways, postal service, and the energy reserve; the formation of state-driven production of affordable medications.
- 500 billion pounds investments; 250 billion pounds in credit.
- Demand employee ownership with one-third of positions on executive boards and boards of supervision occupied by workers.
- A fund to provide for worker ownership: for instance, 500 pounds annually to be paid out to employees from corporate revenues, and investments in so-called green jobs to be financed.

### **Bernie Sanders's and AOC's Green New Deal**

- Carbon-free transport (electric cars) and full renewable energy by 2030.
- A US\$15 minimum wage.
- Medicare: universal healthcare for all.
- Job guarantees through public programs for social and ecologically sensible jobs. Just transitions: guaranteed five years of income for workers whose sectors are restructured or dried up for carbon-neutral reasons.
- Fifteen years of investments of 500 billion dollars at the minimum per year, in energy transition, public transport, and e-mobility, and for climate-neutral and afford-

able housing construction, ecological agriculture, and catastrophe resilience.

### Crossovers

All the concepts of the Green New Deal are based on huge investments in social infrastructure, energy transition, and the ecological restructuring of industry. Our proposal for a left Green New Deal comprises a program of decade-long investing in social-ecological renovation of about 130 to 180 billion euros annually. Combined with the development of the welfare state, the program has a cost of about 240 billion euros per year. If measured according to a population basis and economic output, the “Sanders Program” has a similar funding range.

Our Green New Deal conception, like the left projects in the United Kingdom and the United States, includes the creation of meaningful and well-paid work. Over a million well-paid, carbon-free jobs are to be created by means of government investments. Income is safeguarded through the “just transition” of industrial sectors. Like the Labour Party’s Green New Deal, we propose shortened working hours toward a “short full-time” workweek (28–35 hours per week), with equal wages for all. Through the reduction of working hours, millions of jobs in industry and services will be secured.



## THREE

# The Power of the Many, or How We Can Win

### POWERFUL ENEMIES

**T**he idea of a Green New Deal is gaining attention worldwide, far outside the political left. Different actors are ready to engage and mobilize for a social-ecological transformation. Environmental groups belong to this movement, parts of the trade unions, large portions of the climate movement, and many political parties. Without a social coalition within which these actors from different places can work, mobilize, and gather strength a left-wing project for fundamental change will not take place.

But let's not kid ourselves; we're dealing with powerful enemies who have a lot to lose, and who will do everything to continue on the path that promises them their profits, wealth, and might. Among these are the large energy corporations that turn over hundreds of billions of dollars every year with fossil fuels and are delaying abandoning oil, coal, and gas for as long as possible. They form part of the hundred corporations responsible for 70 percent of carbon emissions. The large car companies want to produce more destructive high-end SUVs and premium cars—some with electric motors in the future—for the global middle class. Transnational corporations seek to profit more from the cheap transport of goods around the globe. Cheap because the drivers and many logistics workers earn so little and the ecological

costs aren't found on the receipt. The big grain and chemical companies want to continue to promote agribusiness that delivers them good sales and earnings but depletes the soil and over-fertilizes rivers and oceans.

Nowhere in the world do owners of huge capital and wealth have an interest in financing the expansion of the common good or a program of investments for social-ecological reorganization. Instead, the past three decades have brought them radical cuts to capital and wealth taxes. The companies and capital associations have long become accustomed to low wages, precarious working conditions, and weakened collective bargaining, as well as the retreat of trade union influence. All this ensures a high degree of exploitation.

Corporations and business groups use their economic power to affect political sway. Lobbying groups make sure laws and regulations bear the signature of political decisions. Most often, governments are not even under special pressure. The alliance is organic. Corporate donations and the easy switch between party debates and business boardrooms are only a superficial expression of the all-encompassing arrangement of the dominant culture, class, and established political interests. Consensus reigns in conservative bourgeois-liberal parties and relevant parts of social-democratic parties: one cannot rule against the corporations—their interests are fundamental to the smooth running of the economy.

Let's look at a recent example from Berlin. The real estate lobby, with the support of the Christian Democratic Union of Germany (CDU) and the Free Democratic Party (FDP), launched a million-euro campaign against the housing policies of the Red-Red-Green state government to prevent the rent cap. This was when the rental cap was on the agenda, pushed forward by tenants' movements and the initiative of DIE LINKE in the Berlin Senate. Billboards everywhere were crying out about the supposedly devastating consequences of the housing policy. Threats were made that investments

would be withheld and, consequently, no new housing would be built. The law passed and the real estate lobby lost the first round of struggle, which was possible because there was a fighting tenants' movement putting such radical demands as the expropriation of real estate corporations onto the agenda. It was also possible because a clear majority of Berliners thought the rental cap was a good idea and DIE LINKE remained steadfast in the coalition. This success in Berlin resonated and is a positive example for the further initiatives in other regions and federal states.

#### SYSTEM CHANGE BEYOND CAPITALISM! BUT HOW?

Parts of the left criticize the concept of a left Green New Deal, saying it won't go far enough, that it's just a left governmental project and barely critical of capitalism. They say that the system must instead be brought into question, with a direct and offensive struggle for an eco-socialist world.

Yet revolutionary processes arise out of the work of human beings in exceptional historical situations, from real class struggles. Questioning the system is not the concern of rhetoric. A renewed democratic socialism can only succeed if it convinces and inspires an overwhelming majority of people. German economist Jörg Huffschmid replied to the critics on the Marxist left of the developed reform alternatives: "These positions insist on the 'pure doctrine' yet turn away from an analysis of present reality and a corresponding further development. There is a no man's land between the struggle for socialism and the struggle for tea water" (Huffschmid/Jung 1988, 149).

The left cannot permit itself to carry out politics divorced from the real balance of power and movements. Our task is to open the possibility, to name everything that has to be changed and overturned, so that a good life for the majority of people may become feasible. But there are two things we must

not do: exaggerate radical positions primarily on paper; and embellish concrete struggles and actions. Struggles are very important. But, given a long-term perspective, struggles can only forge their social strength when we connect them with a common political project of the socialist and broader left.

Democratic socialist strategies must be renewed. We find ourselves in the middle of the development of a new democratic-socialist, ecological, and feminist perspective for the twenty-first century (see F. E. Wright 2019; Porcaro 2015; Fraser/Arruzza/Battcharja 2019; Panitch/Gindin 2020; Zelik 2020; Dörre/Schickert 2019; Sunkhara 2020; Zeller 2020). The debate over a left Green New Deal (see Klein 2019; Pettifor 2020; Politische Ökologie 2019), as it takes place around the Labour Party (see McDonnell 2018) and the U.S. left and the Democratic Socialists of America (Aronoff/Battistoni/Riofrancos 2019), is part of this process of searching, as are the many debates in DIE LINKE and the Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung (Candeias 2020), or the exchange about care economies, solidarity economies, and de-growth. The next few years will be about consolidating and rooting and anchoring them more within society at large.

In the conditions of globalized neoliberal capitalism and transformed work and living realities of workers in the precarious service society, a purely social-democratic politics is no longer adequate to attain left-wing hegemony, anyway. The social-democratic left has been mired in a strategic dead-end since the 1970s. Even the more modern attitudes of post-growth and climate justice that center a left-wing alternative around a new economy are not enough. They aren't enough because they lack an organizing perspective for labor conflicts and new forms of solidarity of the many-sided wage-dependent class. They have no concrete options for the restructuring of the economy and the societal division of labor, in particular for the necessary social-ecological transformation of industry and trade.

The conception of a left Green New Deal combines left-Keynesian political approaches anchored in trade unions and social democracy, eco-social-reformist and growth critical proposals, with socialist proposals for an alternative project capable of winning a left-wing hegemony. In this way it can build on already existing struggles and social movements. New approaches for a socialist transformation have to enter into real social movement, as a component and driving force. When people begin to move and stand up for their concrete interests and goals, and therefore struggle, we can be sure that they are looking for far-reaching, even fundamental, solutions. They are, at the very least, open to them. The widespread call for system change shows that these searching processes and left proposals for a Green New Deal are attractive perspectives that offer entry points and radical visions.

A left Green New Deal must be enforced against the power of corporations, capital associations, and parties that represent their interests. Author and activist Naomi Klein hints at how President Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal of the 1930s was also a reaction to numerous workers' uprisings and a strong, militant trade-union wing (Klein 2019). At the time, anti-capitalist and socialist conceptions were on the rise within some segments of the working class. One lesson from history is that major improvements and reforms are achieved as concessions when there is a strong social force that questions capitalism on a fundamental level and wants to overcome it.

We are far from that today, at least if we look at traditional movements and organizations. Millions of people, however, are hitting the streets and building new movements. These are often referred to as "spontaneous" or "unorganized" by pundits, because new organizations are not understood. Many young people participate cheerfully, optimistically, and, of course, question capitalism's fundamentals. Polls repeatedly show that a majority rejects the existing economic system

as being unjust, and favors “socialism,” even in the United States. The meaning they give to socialism is different from our conceptions, but also means something very different from the existing order. The established powers are hardly ruffled by these young people because it isn’t clear how they can translate their ideas into political power. But it doesn’t have to remain that way.

### UNION RENEWAL AND CONNECTIVE CLASS POLITICS

In the global economic crisis, made worse by the COVID-19 pandemic, we can expect a strengthened concentration of capital and productivity gains. Solutions to social and ecological questions aren’t forthcoming. The trade unions cannot simply get back to business.

Moreover, and somewhat running against the opinion of employees, parts of the trade unions and social left in Germany see the “climate question” as a diversion or as a distraction from workers’ interests. The opposite is true. In a left Green New Deal the political strategy is to create jobs, not only in industrial production of rail and transport but in the radical advance of work relations in care and services. At the core of a left-wing Green New Deal is the goal to minimize precarious work and fight for higher wages and shorter workweeks, and for strong welfare and social security.

The trade union movement has always risen in social significance when it not only fights for concrete improvements but campaigns for a fundamental transformation of society. A left Green New Deal is our proposal to combine both of these elements of trade union politics. The trade union movement needs a comprehensive project and a vision for the future of work in order to come out of the economic, ecological, and social cataclysms stronger. It includes drawing together the common class interests of very fragmented wage dependents.

How can the social-ecological transformation interest the trade unions?

1. The left Green New Deal is a program to overcome divisions and exclusion within the working class by pushing back precarious work. It proposes a path toward the strengthening of workers in industry, social vocations, and commerce and aims to rebuild the regulative capacity of the trade unions. With an initiative for collective bargaining, the shortening of work hours with equal pay, and the adjustment of work time to the rhythms of life, trade unions could be at the forefront for a new welfare model. They could become a pole of attraction, especially among young workers and a large percentage of female workers in the service sector.
2. Our concept of infrastructure socialism, the expansion of the commons and public infrastructure, is directed toward creating millions of new social and collectively regulated jobs and strengthening the trade unions in the public and private service sector. After the COVID-19 crisis has thrown into public consciousness the importance of viable healthcare systems (that pay workers adequately), the trade unions will have an opportunity to begin a political offensive for the municipal takeover of private hospitals, against the privatization of the healthcare system. Tied to the demand of a pay raise for all “essential workers” and universally binding collective bargaining agreements, the political offensive would massively strengthen its power resources. There might be wider support for it among retail workers, too. Workers who suddenly become “system relevant” can use their new status and struggle for better pay and working conditions. Governments would come under pressure if they hesitate or reject outright the demands for improvement among the groups of workers they had praised during the COVID-19 crisis.

3. An expansion of rights for collective workplace participation in decisions and the establishment of regional economic councils would strengthen the power of employees and their trade unions. In Germany today, only one in four workplaces still has a works council. With casual work, outsourcing, giving work to contractors, the reduction or relocation of parts of businesses takes place outside workplace participation in decisions. This weakens the representation of interests in the workplace and the unions. Decisions about the transformation of industry and the technological innovations bound up with it threaten to take place over the heads of workers and their representatives. The fact that trade union leaders were (again) invited to talks with Chancellor Merkel during the economic crisis changes nothing at all. When it comes to major social and political conflicts over who pays for the crisis, or the future of collective agreements and wages in the industry, workers' interests will be swept under the table.

A democratic offensive of the unions is therefore long overdue. More workplace participation in decisions with the focus on workplace democracy, as our proposal for a left Green New Deal provides, offers the chance for broad social alliances to develop political dynamics and create social pressure. Socially sensible, ecologically sustainable, and well-paid work with regulated labor conditions under the democratic participation of employees and residents are equivalent goals. The wide support for goals such as the shortening of the working day and a better harmony of work and family life, successful alliances against the privatization of hospitals or other public services, and parents' solidarity with students and teachers during the school strikes for climate justice show that new alliances are possible. To gain more political force, trade unions must overcome their factional limits and



coordinate with one another to publicly put forth and fight for common goals that aim toward improvements for major parts of the population.

The defense and expansion of the welfare state are key issues for trade unions and their members, given conditions created by the greatest world economic crisis since the post-war period. Capital is trained and experienced enough to push the consequences of the crisis onto the backs of workers and the unemployed. The companies are already warning against more state benefits and demanding tax cuts, especially for companies, and the withdrawal of environmental protections. *Kurzarbeit*, a state-subsidized form of work-time reduction—albeit paid from the employees’ insurance funds—initially saved many jobs. Government measures, investment programs, and credit also have to be financed. There will be a ferocious struggle over distribution—only *if* the trade unions fight. The conditions are better than at the beginning of the 2000s, when neoliberal hegemony was uninterrupted and alternatives were hardly imaginable. Throughout the COVID-19 crisis, millions of people have experienced how important stable social systems and social benefits are to prevent society from plunging into poverty and existential crises. Are these better conditions able to begin the defense and expansion of the welfare state?

### **New Alliances between Labor and Environment?**

Trade unions must be an important partner for the climate protection movement and vice versa. Olaf Bandt, leader of the major environmentalist association BUND, stresses how important the “social question” and cooperation with the trade unions and left parties has become for the environmental movement. Even if focal points are different, the possibilities for new alliances are there. Bandt pleaded for a new “welfare economy” in a joint contribution with Ulrich

Schneider, the president of the German Welfare Parity Association.

Now is the time for unions to seize the opportunity for these new alliances. Young workers already see that the climate crisis is threatening them and their children's future. Many of them see social justice and climate justice as inseparable. Together with the growing organization of workers in the service sector, particularly in social work, education, childcare and healthcare, a renewal—not yet visible everywhere—of the base of the trade union movement is already underway.

Bernd Riexinger's focus, based on his experience as a union leader in the service sector, is to revitalize the trade unions. To do this, it is necessary for new strike forms—such as the democratization of strikes, workers' struggle as a means to strengthen the organization and gain support in combination with public actions—to be tested and developed (see Riexinger 2018). New forms of struggle mean the workers themselves are the strategic center of the struggle.

This sounds dangerous or utopian to many trade union bureaucrats. But, in our experience, it is the most fruitful way for the trade union movement to win back its strength, with millions of experienced activists fighting together with their leadership work toward a just future. DIE LINKE sees itself as part of this movement, as an important force in and reliable partner of the trade union movement. Many DIE LINKE members work in the trade unions. They see the left and trade union policy as two sides of the same struggle.

In this crisis, the trade unions must decide for themselves as to whether they will strengthen their mobilizing, organizing, and conflict-oriented representation or whether they will accept, even partially, to go down the road of corporatist cooperation with export-oriented capital. Significantly, the chances of a social-ecological breakthrough depend on these crossroads.

Hans-Jürgen Urban, leading member of IG Metall and the trade union left, warned of the “craving for the normality of the good old pre-crisis period” that exists in society. He held firm that pre-crisis German capitalism was not a utopia of progressive politics and demanded a change of course to the left’s “foundational correctives in production and distribution relations.” Alongside a program of investments, climate-friendly infrastructure, energy-saving and emission-reducing methods of production, regional and nationwide transformation councils should prepare the conditions for economic democracy: “In brief, the perspective is not private capitalism, but economic democracy” (Urban 2020).

Of course, there are also completely different opinions of works councils and trade unions that demand the scrapping of bonuses, even for new diesel cars. We have seen this as trade unionists, especially in the energy supply sector. These demands do no favors for the workers over the medium term. Just like their managers, the works council of Energie Baden-Württemberg AG (ENBW) defended nuclear power and coal-fired power plants. Even as more municipalities began to buy back their power grids and establish their own public municipal services, the leading department in Stuttgart organized a demonstration against the founding of public municipal service. We came under serious pressure from sections of the leadership for criticizing that. In the end, ENBW was taken by complete surprise with the nuclear phase out decision in 2011 and lost its operating model through energy supply decentralization. This is an example of how being on the side of management is *no perspective for the trade unions*. They must go their own way and open up new perspectives.

#### MORE THAN THE SUM OF PARTS

Countless social movements have taken shape in the last

decade, reaching astounding mobilizing force and changing the political landscape in Germany. Millions of people in the climate movement have dynamically called for a radical new set of politics, and this movement will hit the streets again after the COVID-19 crisis. Tens of thousands have protested against the deforestation of Hambach Forest and with Ende Gelände (civil disobedience movement occupying German coal mines) for a rapid exit from climate-damaging coal. Hundreds of thousands showed their determination on the streets for a humane refugee policy, against racism, exclusion, and right-wing hatred (see Brücke, Unteilbar, Ausgehetzt, “We’ll come united”). They are not “single issue movements.” They point to the needs of refugee movements, to displacement, poverty, arms exports, and wars.

Global warming will rob millions of people of viable conditions for existence and force them to flee because of erosion and despoliation of the soil, flooding, increasingly severe and frequent storms, and forest and bush fires. These connections are forcing their way into public consciousness. And those in the “*unteilbar*” (indivisible) coalition, in which antiracist and antifascist initiatives, unions, welfare organizations, climate initiatives, and DIE LINKE party participate, have said: We will not let ourselves be played off against each other. Their slogan is “Solidarity Is Indivisible.”

This picture is hardly complete. One could add demonstrations for healthy eating and organic food production—“We are fed up,” the theme of the protests—for social movements for affordable rents, better healthcare, or strikes for better pay for children’s educators, as well as a new generation that has revitalized the March 8 International Women’s Day struggle. These movements aren’t isolated from each other, but are bound together through political convictions and sometimes the people involved. It would also be an error to reduce trade unionists to wages and labor. Many hospital employees or children’s educators, who are striking for better

work conditions and higher wages, are also active in support for climate protection and solidarity with refugees, and the struggle against racism. Many active climate protectors are also not blind to the interests of industrial or manual workers and their demands for social justice.

The climate protection movement is politicizing a substantial part of the youth. American trade union activist Jane McAlevey, who is active in the movement for a Green New Deal, writes of the climate strikes:

Images in mainstream and social media were constellated with pictures of young people marching into plazas across the world, confronting intransigent elected officials and speaking truth to power. Youth has always brought two essential ingredients to social movements: moral compass and an exciting, unique form of energy. Their goals are brilliant, and they are uncompromising. But to halt and reverse the carbon economy, save the planet, and create a future with jobs that youth will look forward to requires far more power and a serious strategy. (McAlevey 2020.)

There is more power in social coalitions that collaborate on a common political project, in which their demands and goals are bound with those of others. In this way, a left Green New Deal coalition has to be more than just a summary of single movements. It is about a new political quality, a collection of trade unionists (or parts of unions), social, ecological, democratic movements, and initiatives for a society of solidarity. For years we, with Bundestag representative and DIE LINKE member Katja Kipping, have been inviting groups and organizations from social and ecological movements to joint meetings. We haven't yet agreed on a common political project, but these meetings have opened up new channels of sympathetic cooperation between the party and movements.

The actual cooperation between DIE LINKE and these movements takes place in myriad meetings and in actions. But it is good to get a strategic, eagle-eyed view of what needs to be done and developed in the future.

Important connections were made when service sector labor union Verdi and the climate protection movement struggled in 2020 for a collective agreement for commuter transport workers. The common strike days of Fridays for Future shared by the public and the employees of communal transport companies are a good example of a fruitful coalition and “connecting class politics” (Riexinger 2019). Such campaigns also create trust. Bus drivers’ demands for higher wages and better working conditions also meet with the goals of climate justice fighters for the expansion of public transport.

Workers in low-wage sectors want a better future for their children and wages adequate for a good life. So do the caregivers and workers in social services who organize for recognition and better payment for the important work they do. Young families, single parents, and industrial workers want good working conditions and meaningful jobs with a future. Muslims, Christians, atheists, students, people of diverse beliefs or gender and sexual orientations—all can become creators of a fundamental social movement. In doing so, they will no longer be cast aside or deterred.

#### DOES THE LEFT HAVE TO GOVERN?

Nothing we’d like to change is small: disempower the financial markets, democratize decisions on investments and turn them toward an ecological and socially just direction, and democratize and transform the state itself. All this would put our society on completely novel foundations and radically shift the balance of power.

How can we realize reforms that work toward these

radical transformations? What do we have to do in the meantime? How can we make progress and assure the gains of the movements? The left-wing debate over the state and governing has a long history. It has been shaped by many misunderstandings and illusions, such as the state is a neutral instrument that must be taken over; that whoever wins the state also wields its power; or conversely, that the state is only an instrument of capital and corporations. Conceptions like these also thread through the long debate over strategy in DIE LINKE. How should we confront the question of government?

The state is not neutral and not the center of power. It is important to understand that power and class relations condense within the state, which is the field where different interests—class interests—are fought out.

It is the field in which interests of capital are principally organized, for instance, how production costs can be cut and new markets created in other countries or through the privatization of public services. Also, how the interests of workers and other groups can be taken up selectively to secure social peace and cohesion. The quality and scope of welfare depends on the organized strength of the labor movement. The welfare state, the shortening of work hours and free education are the outcome of past struggles. Laws are ultimately passed in parliament, but parliament itself is not the only center of decision. Power condensed in the state lies in the central ministries as well as in informal networks of power crisscrossing the central bank, state and public institutions, police, and the military.

At the same time, the balance of power is not condensed “of itself” in parliament; it must also be organized. Whoever sits in parliament and doesn’t organize his or her own forces will win no victories. Yet if important movement demands and goals are not set into law and secured by the state, any ground that has been won can easily be lost. But if the

economy is not transformed and economic power restricted, change swiftly metamorphoses back into political power. We see this now in certain Latin American states.

Voters expect left parties to change something concretely for the better, govern wherever they can, and implement their basic projects. If this proves difficult, owing to the prevailing power relations, demoralization quickly follows. Debates back and forth and false opposites also proliferate.

To put societal power relations at the heart of the question of left-wing governing also means taking seriously the transformations of capitalism and the neoliberal state. The state has been steadily de-democratized and opened up to the direct influence of corporate interests. Even social democratic intellectuals like sociologist Colin Crouch have spoken for some time about the development of a “post-democracy,” which has also contributed to the crisis of traditional social democracy. However, in the post-Second World War period, social democracy could implement a welfare-state project of reform because there was a strong trade union movement and because the growth rates were so high. Costs could be covered without a merciless struggle over the proceeds. The growing purchasing power of the wage-dependent class was a central precondition for the ascent of Fordist mass production. Capitalism was stable and regulated by the nation-state. Despite all this, much of the important social progress, such as paid sick leave, free Saturdays, or the monthly co-decisions (parity in co-determination of the board of supervisors in the coal and steel industries) had to be effected through powerful strikes, in the face of resistance of the bosses and parts of the state. Actually, many of the social welfare gains were first secured through collective bargaining and then cemented into law.

Let’s picture, for the moment, the present coalition, taking DIE LINKE’s tax plans seriously. It is considering the introduction of the wealth tax. The collapse of the West



would be the last thing to be prophesied. The “New Social Free Market Initiative,” a social mobilization of capital associations, the Springer Press and other media fronts, as well as the German Union Parties (CDU/CSU), FDP, and the Alternative for Germany Party (AFD) would collaborate in an enormous closing of ranks. Threats of relocations to other countries, mass job cuts, and outsourcing would be part of the campaign. It would be impossible for us to win without strengthened trade unions, social coalitions, and social and ecological movements supporting a left government in solidarity, and without majority consent from the population and an independent social and left-wing counteroffensive in the public realm—all this is equally impossible without a stronger DIE LINKE.

**WE NEED A CONNECTIVE, EXTRA-PARLIAMENTARY PLATFORM  
FOR A GREEN NEW DEAL**

To bring about such an urgently needed and vital social-ecological system change, organized counter-power and left-wing majorities are required. Left-wing governing cannot be equated with a Center-Left Red-Red-Green government. This project is not just about party coalitions, it is also about a fundamental change of course for politics. At least since the Red-Green Agenda government of Schröder and Fischer, it's hard to speak in the field of political parties and the parliament of a “left camp.” A left Green New Deal, as presented here, is hardly to be expected from the Socialist Democratic Party of Germany (SPD) or the Greens in their current constitution. The Greens want to keep the Black-Green option, a coalition of Christian Democratic or conservative (identified with the color black) party and Green Party, open for discussion—they are already governing quietly with the CDU in some federal states.

We can, however, see in other countries what kind of

social and political mobilizations from the left are possible, under specific conditions: the Bernie Sanders presidential candidacy, Jeremy Corbyn's policy as head of the British Labour Party, 2015–2019, or even the failed governmental project of SYRIZA in Greece. These upsurges revolved around political power, or at least majorities and the concomitant hopes of large parts of the population, for concrete and fast improvements of their living conditions. DIE LINKE cannot ignore expectations for progressive change, even if the preconditions for it are not yet at hand. At the same time, rising expectations for electoral change are not a sufficient strategy.

A genuine social-ecological renewal can only come about with a strong social movement, left-wing leadership, and a fortified left. The social movements of the past years have mobilized hundreds of thousands of people for climate protection, indivisible solidarity, against racism, and for affordable rents. Strikes in the service industries have grown and new forms of labor strikes have developed. Women and migrants are important drivers of many of the present social movements.

No social power has thus far emerged that is able to advance a democratic and transformative force that can seize and change existing parties and governments, state institutions, and public consciousness. Aiming for a center-left government without being able to effect a fundamental transformation of power relations would be certain to fail.

We have to consider "government" from the perspective of leadership. The rejection of governmental participation, owing to principle, leads to a deadend if it is restricted to a verbal and programmatic radicalism and is not in a position to organize effective, concrete gains in working and living conditions. Conversely, the emphasis on the "governmental question" can lead to a neglect of the crucial problem of leadership and the development of people's democratic

and transformative power in everyday lives. This neglect can quickly lead to monumental defeats for a left-wing governmental project—or in tailoring a left-wing change in the framework of a capitalist modernization. DIE LINKE cannot restrict its political significance to governmental participation that reduces itself to a queued-up governing party in waiting—as is the case of the Greens. We fight and organize for a left, social-ecological, and socialist ascendancy in society.

DIE LINKE is an energetic power, a motor of confrontations for a social and ecological system change. In certain questions, there is a strong commonality between the members of the SPD, the Greens, and DIE LINKE with social majorities that already campaign for such benefits as higher taxes on the rich, poverty-resistant pensions, and steady rather than precarious labor. We should exert effort across the parties, and with social movements and trade unions, to forge a social alliance for a Green New Deal. We should demand that a social-ecological government should incorporate projects that are bound up with these organizing campaigns and mobilizations. A movement for a left-wing Green New Deal must work to reach the rank and file of different parties, especially Social Democracy and the Greens. DIE LINKE can make political arguments to these parties that convince their own members. We must be able to unite to struggle, hand in hand, in the workplace and on the street. Alliances can be made with sections of the parties at every layer.

Left-wing governmental participation must be tied to clear projects with minimum conditions. Such projects would include increasing the minimum wage, poverty-resistant pensions that defend living standards, a minimum of social welfare instead of the Hartz IV limitations, collective bargaining for all workers, and secure, not precarious, labor, rental caps, the introduction of a wealth tax, disarmament, and a stop to all Bundeswehr (armed forces) in excursions

abroad. They would also fight against growing unemployment and create millions of collectively and socially regulated public sector jobs with democratic participation. These concrete projects must be part of a democratic process, both in the party and in the movements connected to us. Otherwise, demoralization and demobilization are preordained.

A left Green New Deal proposes a new platform for social alliances and political cooperation. Engaging in such a connective platform, environmental initiatives won't automatically become tenants' movements or trade union initiatives. It is, however, possible to combine perspectives, strengthening each and gathering force by constructing common political goals and initiatives. Most important is developing common approaches to practice and rallying new experiences of solidarity and collective labor. Power and political authority mature through collective practice and action.

## Build a Connective and Organizing Membership Party

**T**he state is a condensation of social power relations and organized domination under capitalism. It is a contested power relation through which compromises are made, and in which the interests of the major fractions of capital: transnational corporations, banks, and multimillionaires predominate. Without a transformation and democratization of the state—parallel with the democratization of every area of social life, the economy included—every effort of social reform will remain stifled. The road to get there does not involve an intense, short sprint, but rather a long-distance marathon. There are no shortcuts. Staying on the road requires durable organizing and the construction of a counter-power: a new democratic and transformative power of the many, who are engaged in their workplaces, constituencies, movements, trade unions, and parties.

Regarding parties, many people, including those involved in movements, still think first of elections, the makeup of parliament, and governing coalitions. The function of left-wing parties that want to fundamentally transform existing social conditions and relations, however, goes further than this.

### COUNTER-HEGEMONY

When it comes to rallying different social groups, Gramsci speaks of “hegemony”: building common worldviews, interests, and goals for better working and living conditions

among a fragmented class. The contradictory nature of capitalism always produces social and political conflicts that are more or less isolated from one another. Climate protection, working conditions, debilitating rental conditions, poverty and social exclusion, flight and migration, war and the arms trade are often treated as separate issues. However, the problems underlying them most often have systemic causes. We have to say what these systemic issues of capitalism are without oversimplifying their causal connections. The task of a party is to analyze and together find radical solutions.

Christina Kaindl, the leader of DIE LINKE's department for strategy, describes this task in the following way:

It is not only a question of formulating the correct demands, but also developing praxis: strengthening the party's own policy by anchoring it among the organized members and support self-organizing of those concerned. And linking up with them through debate and offers of collective strategic development. . . . The "collective will" from below is not formed in a straightforward way; it is a created representation, organized, threaded together, bound by interests and individuals, groups and discourses. Featured in the form of organization, the collective will has a greater ability to operate.

On this point, Kaindl, referring to Gramsci's concept of the social party, continues: "There are powers in society that stand opposed to the power-bloc, which act as an undercurrent and next to many diverse actors. They could become much stronger and form (counter)hegemony—if an organization thrives" (Kaindl 2020).

In this sense, the further development of DIE LINKE into a connective and organized membership party was a particular concern of Bernd Riexinger's leadership in previous years and is at the center of our attempts to build the party.

The concept of a connective party goes back to 2015 when independent researcher and member of Alternative Europa, Mimmo Porcaro, set out to create a new form of left-wing party rather than the old “cadre party.” New left-wing parties, he thought, must forge a “stable alliance of party and movements.”

This was the answer to the failed traditional vanguard party model, epitomized by many communist parties. The concept of a connective party is also different from that of a purely horizontal network of different movements. It should overcome the many-sided social and cultural divisions within the working class through the connection of many forms and spaces of organized solidarity in everyday life, and it should make possible the construction of organized power. All this, without the “old” form of the centralized mass organizations with hierarchical leadership.

We in DIE LINKE have picked up on the concept of a connective party and translated it for the development of our party (see Riexinger 2018). Today, we are richer because of certain experiences and can determine more precisely what can be understood of a connective party in our context.

First, the connection of many movements and struggles into a social power. This is about building organized power, tying together workplace and collective bargaining struggles and debates with social movements.

Second, the step toward counter-hegemony: bringing different interests and social conflicts into a political project. Many movements have simultaneously raised the question of property and the capitalist mode of economy. For instance, the tenants’ movement demands a stop to the expropriation of real estate corporations and refuses a housing policy based on profit, whereas the climate movement demands a system change. DIE LINKE can play a specific role in connecting “defensive struggles” against social and democratic decay with an overall critique of society and a positive project for

the future. If these movements can be tied to substantial and practical everyday concerns of people in workplaces and neighborhoods, projects like the left Green New Deal will thus develop a greater gravitational pull.

Third, this is why we work to create a new type of organizing party that builds mass membership from below, which is anchored in society, trade unions, workplaces, neighborhoods, social movements, and various progressive initiatives.

### BE A PARTISAN FOR SYSTEM CHANGE

In the last few years, we've managed to strengthen DIE LINKE's base in society and to build an active role in social movements. We are running organizing campaigns for more nursing personnel and affordable rents. We support initiatives of the unemployed and solidarity with refugees. We are present with mutual aid and social counseling services and political initiatives in poor neighborhoods and communes, the "social hot spots" that other parties have long abandoned. We speak to workers in low-wage sectors and support labor and struggles over pay in childcare centers and hospitals, and in retail and industry, including mega-corporations like Amazon and Ryanair.

When we think about the anti-communism that has been rooted in society for decades, and the 1990s neoliberal assumption that there is "no alternative," then we realize that it is a massive achievement of DIE LINKE to have built, out of the protests against the Agenda 2010 (a series of German government reforms in the early 2000s), a new, nationwide left-wing party. DIE LINKE—the Left Party—has become an all-German membership party. In the last few years, it has also become more established in the West, younger in many places, and stronger, particularly in the cities. We have been able to build up our campaigns and capacity for action. This has not happened for no reason; it is the result of consciously



targeted and organized party-building. Many active members have helped in generating a common understanding of the political function and workings of an emancipatory, democratic socialist party.

One glance at other countries is enough to see that we are among the more successful left-wing parties in Europe. However, we have not yet been able to become stronger across the entire playing field. DIE LINKE is relatively strong in urban and metropolitan areas. The differences between the small and medium-sized cities, and the rural and village-like areas, are vast. This difference also impedes entrance into West German state parliaments.

If we abstract for a moment from the particular political constellations that impact election results, there is, over the long term, a clear relationship between membership strength, ability to mobilize, and election results. There is no lasting electoral success without a conscious effort of organized party building. Orientation party strategy, often discussed as “left-populism,” which relies primarily on charismatic leaders and the promise of another government, can lead to quick electoral success—but only in certain social constellations that are experiencing a profound crisis of leadership and distrust in the bourgeois parties. However, these charismatic leadership-oriented party models risk quickly falling back to the reality of their organized strength and base, as we can see in the cases of Podemos in Spain or La France Insoumise in France. Election campaigns that mobilize and deploy clear language in messages that actually hit their targets and credible and convincing candidates are indispensable. Yet the more active the members of a left-wing party (which must often sway people toward alternatives against the wind of the mainstream media), the stronger its foundation. We can radically transform society if we make a new leap in the development of a connective and organizing party and establish an alternative project rooted in everyday political practice and society.

### Organize to Win: Campaigns

Three years ago, as a reaction to increasing social division and precaritization, we threw ourselves into pilot projects to address “social burning points”—neighborhoods in which nothing actually burns, but instead are filled with low-income residents. We continue to talk and organize there among people who have turned away from politics and think that political parties don’t care about them. Our organizing begins with a door-knock conversation: How do you experience your part of town? What needs to change? Through conversations, we understand which problems prevail in the locality. Offers for networking and organization are made for this purpose—roundtables, breakfast meetings, and various events.

Compared to movements that spontaneously take shape or can be the condensed expression of problems and conflicts long in the making, campaigns become planned political initiatives and are important instruments for education. They can build pressure to win demands and influence political decisions. The demands must be concrete and feasible. Necessary for these campaigns are many-sided actions, which are built like waves and produce more and more pressure. They offer organizing possibilities simultaneously with possibilities for cooperation, which encourages individuals to push themselves further. By embracing the activities of a campaign, for instance, one can come to understand some specific opponents and contradictions of your own personal struggles, in ways that simply handing out leaflets “by yourself” would never allow. The starting point here is the concrete problems that are trapping many. In best-case scenarios, they clearly symbolize foundational and systemic reasons and connections. Thus, a new perspective on the conditions of their lives can give individuals their own power to act.

The rent campaign is one example of a new perspective.

It operates across the country and involves both local tenants initiatives and collectives—some of which DIE LINKE called into life. Rents have been going through the roof for some time now in many localities. After the major cities and urban centers, high-rent development in medium-sized cities, even in the East, has followed. Poorer parts of the population are being thrown out of their neighborhoods onto the periphery, while speculators and real estate companies celebrate their profits. We have demanded the annual construction of 250,000 residential houses, and that they be placed, not for profit, in public or community hands. We have further demanded that rents across Germany be capped (introducing a binding limit to the local rent level and reducing higher rents accordingly), and that large real estate corporations be socialized. Many actions have gone ahead, tenants' coalitions have been founded, local political initiatives started, and demonstrations and rallies organized.

The Berlin rental cap was pushed through by DIE LINKE, working with the tenants' movement, in an open class confrontation with real estate groups and their lobbies. No rent increases are now permissible for five years, and over 80 percent of rents are required to be lowered. That is a concrete success. The real estate lobby is ailing in the media and the courts. The majority of the population is on the side of DIE LINKE—even when it comes to demand for expropriations. In many other cities, DIE LINKE is also active around rental policy, particularly where members work closely with tenants' initiatives and the right to city services. DIE LINKE is becoming a leading force in the fight over affordable housing. At the Hamburg state elections, DIE LINKE was given the highest value of competence on the issue of housing.

We have to win more active supporters if we are to push through our demands. In the coming years, with orientations inspired by community activism and left-wing local work, as well as the Labour Party in Great Britain and the Sanders

campaigns, we can further develop our campaign work and generate a new quality of organizing campaigns.

Similarly, regarding our healthcare campaign, the majority opinion today, strengthened by the COVID-19 pandemic, is that it was—and is—wrong to close or privatize hospitals and to introduce capitalist economic criteria and profits into emergency care. Our long-established campaign and the many strikes and actions by Verdi (one of Germany's biggest trade unions) and other activists have contributed to this shift of attitudes. For campaigns to function, there needs to be nationwide political and organizational groups at the grassroots level, which can coordinate their work and thus be able to produce a reciprocal dynamic involving many different local campaigns to organize nationwide days of action and campaigns at decisive points. If others throw themselves into campaigns, in alliance with or parallel to them, then something like a "punctual hegemony" can take shape.

This was the case in aged care. Jens Spahn, Germany's health minister, had to give wide-ranging concessions and remove financing for more aged care facilities from the system of flat-rate payments. However, the force of inertia is apparent, since nothing else was agreed to in the government's coronavirus stimulus package. The financing of more care facilities has hardly led to an increase in staff being hired. Because on the one hand, economic streamlining is firmly rooted in the running of hospitals; on the other hand, there is no staff mobilizing healthcare workers to upgrade careers through much improved salaries and markedly better working conditions has been neglected.

We at DIE LINKE bring social and workplace-based policy initiatives and demands into the parliaments and give them media presence to the best of our ability. The mass protests by nurses in France throughout June 2020 are reminders that neoliberal policies have led to a massive healthcare emergency throughout Europe. There are vibrant struggles

for the public role, common good, and equal pay for women's work. Furthermore, other workers in the service sector, like teachers, bus and tram drivers, and employees in health services, will no longer settle for precarious conditions. We hope there will be many more who follow this example.

The social-ecological revolution in transport is surely a further project for an organizing campaign in the coming years. Concrete gains could be made and social alliances for a left Green New Deal would be constructed. The demand for a massive construction of public transport infrastructure and the railway, connected to the reduction of ticket prices and a focus on ticket-free use, combines the climate protection movement, environmental groups, and other initiatives—all see improvement in transport as an important contribution to the achievement of climate protection targets. Large portions of society, among them schoolchildren and university students, as well as the elderly who have inadequate pensions and are limited in their ability to move around, support these demands because of their social interests. The Nuremberg branch of DIE LINKE, for instance, set up a pathbreaking campaign for a 365-euro ticket, which won allies that are not habitually on the left: churches, sports associations, bars, pubs, and their workers, student representatives, and so on. In a short space of time, they collected over twenty thousand signatures. The campaign ended with a victory: the local city council decided to introduce a 365-euro ticket, similar to DIE LINKE's concept.

The transformation of the car industry alongside the development of public transport will create new, secure jobs. There is admittedly quite some road to go, to organize and build alliances until the car industry struggles ahead for ecological and just conversion. Moving this along is an important task for the political left: organizing workplace councils, union delegates, representatives of "Fridays for Future," and environmental groups, in debates and deliberations in which

different interests will be respected as solutions are worked out, side by side.

In July 2020, at the invitation of the workplace council and the local IG Metall, Bernd Riexinger visited an office of one of the large auto suppliers. Site production was about to be shut down and relocated to Hungary, with three hundred workers at risk of losing their jobs. Obviously, we stand on the side of the workers, who are fighting for their jobs and their site. The workplace council and union delegates Bernd spoke to knew that things could not continue as usual in the auto-supply industry. Thus, although they remain open to debate about a switch, these workers aren't willing to accept attacks on wages, shoddier working conditions, and de-skilling. They are right not to accept all of this. DIE LINKE shows concrete solidarity for the struggle against the destruction of jobs, tying this solidarity to the struggle for the ecological transformation of industry, job guarantees, and secure income.

We want a transport revolution that will strengthen democracy in the economy, and we have, for instance, put forward a proposal for new property relations at Mercedes. The public sector and the labor force should receive 51 percent of the shares, thus, worker ownership with corresponding rights to veto and a say over the company. We had expected to receive angry letters and responses from the public, but they never arrived. That a majority of the population would reject the demand of the car industries for a scrapping bonus indicates that opinion has changed since the 2019 climate strikes. This gives us room to forge alliances for democratization and the social and ecological transformation of the economy.

**A PARTY OF UNDIVIDABLE SOLIDARITY: FEMINIST, MIGRANT,  
AND ROOTED IN THE TRADE UNIONS**

DIE LINKE wants to bring together the interests of different parts of the working class and different social groups,

and thus “connective class politics” has become a strategic framework for us. This encompasses a wide-ranging concept of interests that include wage labor and unpaid care work, a whole range of living conditions, as well as education and housing conditions, healthcare, and nutrition. The struggle is also about encouraging and solidifying a practice of solidarity in society.

This means developing political projects, focusing mainly on organizing practice and using language that allows for the overcoming of divisions, which is no simple mission. Points of departure can be seen in the example of the rooting of the left in trade unions. DIE LINKE must give a political home to those who want to strengthen unions so they can be at the forefront of a social-ecological restructuring of industry and infrastructure.

Meanwhile, the proposal for a Green New Deal seems to appeal more than ever to industrial workers, skilled as well as casual, and contractors. In the coming years, it will be a question of its implantation in workplaces and trade unions, albeit with a regional approach. At the same time, we address low-wage workers. In 2019 we began the initiative “Higher Wages, Less Stress and Working Hours that Suit Life,” notably in the trade, logistics, and delivery sectors. An important hub of our trade union work is in care and social services, areas with above-average levels of precarious employment, where there have been stronger union organizing and more strikes in the last few years. This orientation is worth continuing—the anchoring and rooting of trade unions requires patient work.

The conditions of struggle, owing to the probability that mass unemployment will take hold in many countries over the next few years, will become much more difficult. Headlines in the tabloid *Bild*, proclaiming that we in Germany will soon have five million unemployed and many bankruptcies, are meant to caution workers that now is not the time to make

demands. “The most important thing is to save jobs and stabilize the economy,” is the slogan. In the 1980s, the unions reacted to the rise of unemployment, not by allowing the bosses to reduce the paid work of millions of people to nothing, but by demanding a 35-hour workweek, with full wages. If we take this idea up again and combine it with a plan for the future regulation of labor, an exit from this crisis that would lead to the improvement of living standards and is not restricted to the defense of the status quo becomes imaginable.

The vision of a real reduction of work time is met with greater favor today for many reasons. Unfortunately, the reality is that there is a massive split between structural underemployment (mini-jobs, 10-hour work contracts, involuntary part-time) and structural overemployment with two billion hours of overtime, half of which are unpaid, as well as the continual extension of work hours. This contradicts the desires of the majority of workers, who strive to harmonize work and their life plans. Polls show that the majority of men and women favor a regular workweek of about 30 to 35 hours. In today’s prevailing power relations, it is scarcely possible for single branches or whole sectors of workers to enforce a collective shortening of work hours in collective bargaining disputes. This necessitates social and political support. Therefore, it is time to put a greater focus on just distribution and shortening of work time on the agenda. DIE LINKE can seriously contribute to this. We have a detailed concept of the regulation of labor for livable wages and for a work-time system that meets the requirements of everyday life. The idea of shortened full-time is attractive to many people. We are solidly pushing this prospect in the trade unions and presenting it in the debate over the future of work. An abundance of personal time is an essential component of a new model of welfare, and an important part of a left Green New Deal.

Such transformations would have a particularly positive impact on women, who, throughout the COVID-19



pandemic, have done most of the unpaid labor in the family, including care and child rearing. Crises like COVID-19 hit low-income and poorly housed families, single parents, and women who aren't able to work from home. Not only are a majority of women who work in numerous "system relevant" occupations affected, but also many migrants. They often work for low wages, and have worse opportunities for education and housing. The COVID-19 crisis has also made it clear that even the lives of people from Romania, Bulgaria, and Poland, many of whom work in the meat-packing industry here, are of less value than the lives of German citizens.

Solidarity is undividable and, for us, this means that the concern for all those who are abandoned and no longer feel represented belongs equally to left-wing solidarity and to support for trade unionists, anti-racists, and feminist struggles. Although differences and separations of these movements have developed over time and won't easily be undone, consciousness has grown in the last few years, with alliances like *Unteilbar*, "Indivisible," a German movement for solidarity and indivisibility of human rights. To stop the encroaching right wing and overcome the multiple economic, climate, and democratic crises, it is necessary to build bridges and connect struggles politically.

A new anti-racist movement, molded by youth activists, has developed, which fights against the structural racism of this society and the deaths of refugees at Europe's borders, as well as the growing number of violent right-wing, racist, anti-feminist, and queer-phobic attacks. A new pro-borderless feminist movement is embracing its fight as a form of struggle (in Germany, it has until now been only symbolic) and is connecting with demands for climate justice and global solidarity.

It is a left-wing party's task to make connections between those whose parents have always lived here and those who have just arrived. We want to create a society where everyone

feels at home and nobody has to fear being different. This includes seeing the party more than ever before as a place for migrant and anti-racist self-organization, as the group Links\*Kanax (German network of LINKE members with refugee or migration history) calls for and epitomizes. Of course, in a party committed to pluralism, this is always more difficult in practice than on paper. The spoken word can exclude people. Instead of speaking over them, we have to give the voiceless a voice, listen, and put our own convictions to the test. To bring about a new political culture requires time for discussion, for understanding, for reciprocal learning processes, and the ability to “stick around.”

If we are sincere about a social and ecological system change, then we can resolve the discussion about “identity” and “class politics.” A new anti-racist, feminist, and ecological class politics can take shape, which is insistent on the simultaneous search for unity among different sectors of wage-laborers and a pluralist left, and it can be developed further, from many different springs.

### NEVER WASTE A CRISIS

Crises do not inevitably uplift progressives or even the forces critical of capitalism. There are also reactionary forms of anti-capitalism. We are dealing now with a capitalism that has within it different intersecting crises, which have partly intensified without immediately calling capitalism’s existence into question. Different movements and counter-powers act in different political arenas, and the task of democratic socialists is to push for what connects these struggles in order to build leadership. Without the radical democratization of capitalism’s hard core—the economy, the social division of labor, property relations, and the state—there can be no radical solution to unpredictable crises and threats of war, or to the everyday problems and fears of people.

Not all questions can be approached at the same time. It is not easy to know which issues and conflicts will come to a head after the current crisis, and it has often been shown that one can seriously err. Movements have their own specific characters and do not necessarily lean toward the ideas and interpretations that we left-wing critics may have. It is therefore meaningful to organize campaigns around different themes and social conflicts through which we can grow and draw strength.

On a world scale, we find ourselves in the deepest economic crisis since the end of the Second World War. Without a shadow of a doubt, this crisis will transform society. Struggles over distribution are becoming harder, even within municipalities. They can impact the local hospital or aged-care facility, public transport, the kindergartens and child-care, libraries, and the financing of climate protection measures. Across the country, unemployment insurance funds that have been emptied by short-term work benefits will soon lead to discussions about cuts to benefits. A freeze on pensions is already in place.

Now is the time to organize the counterattack. All progressive forces must fight a situation in which workers, the unemployed, pensioners, and the socially marginalized pay the costs. The wealthy and the owners of capital, who have been able to fatten their profits for years, must be confronted and made to pay the costs of getting out of this crisis. That would be a great success. For years, a majority in the polls have been in favor of higher taxation of the rich and corporations. But the faith that it is actually possible to politically organize against the collective phalanx of rulers has been missing. The tide, however, could turn. Throughout the pandemic, the importance of the health sector, the public infrastructure, and an orientation to the public good for survival has entered into consciousness. The self-awareness and confidence of workers has risen.

A new wave of cuts and austerity policies would hit a different society from the one that the workfare Hartz Laws (introduced by the Social Democratic-Green government coalition) hit more than fifteen years ago. Today, although there is a new right wing ready to launch a project of authoritarian neoliberalism, the social-ecological forces of solidarity are more powerful. Who is to pay the price for the crisis and who we advance the means for a social-ecological system change is a key conflict from a social and ecological, democratic, feminist, and anti-racist perspective. It will rest on a strong LINKE that can throw itself into the fray of argument in a united and powerful manner. Rising rents, a crisis in care, and the state of public transport are important points of struggle.

It is important to construct an alliance of social movements for social-ecological transformation and undividable solidarity. And, though the left Green New Deal is no master plan for it, it is a strategic proposal as to how we may win a better world. We must remember that Rosa Luxemburg once referred to the dominant order as being “built on sand.” Solidarity in everyday life, combined with what Ernst Bloch called the “concrete utopia” of a new model of welfare and social-ecological system change, is possible. Together, we can find our way and overturn the existing conditions.

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