



# A WINDOW OF OPPORTUNITY FOR LEFTIST POLITICS?

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## HOW TO CONTINUE IN AND AFTER THE CORONA CRISIS

**INSTITUTE FOR CRITICAL SOCIAL ANALYSIS & FRIENDS**

Our goal in this text is not to make any assessments about virology or epidemiology. There are more than enough of those at the moment and we do not claim to be specialists in those fields. Like many others, we are trying to get our bearings in the whirlwind of information, and we invest our trust in the Robert Koch Institute more than in the cooked-up opinions of loudmouth know-it-alls.<sup>1</sup> We are not of the opinion that the German federal and state governments are actors who have simply been waiting to impose authoritarian measures. Nevertheless, we do believe that there are a number of problems with the federal and state actions. These include miscalculating the development of the epidemic; failing to prepare for it by having the health care system be subject to the pressures of costs and profits for many years already; showing an indecisive attitude towards the demands of caregivers as well as demonstrating a number of inconsistencies with the aid packages; and then there's the police assaults in ensuring distancing rules.

Our goal in this text is to address the specific situation of the left amidst the crisis and to show how we can be proactive within it.

## THE SITUATION

The current crisis represents a new form of crisis and can certainly be understood as a sign for those to come. This is because it is not only the result of a dynamic internal to the economy as was the case with the financial crisis, which many on the left had predicted and foreseen. Today's crisis is what the left has called an intersectional crisis: that the metabolic process between nature and society has been disturbed and is thus experiencing a crisis, manifesting itself in the climate crisis as well as through the spread of pathogens. In this regard, the corona crisis is externally induced, every form of society needs to react to it and limit economic and social procedures for a while. And yet, the crisis is also part of the capitalist dynamic, which creates profound crises for the societal relationship to nature. It is in this sense that the cause of the crisis does not come from external forces.

This starts with the expansive mode of production and living that increasingly restrict the habitats of other species, which allow viruses to spread to humans and bacterial pathogens to be transmitted much more readily. To turn the argument on its head, this would mean less capitalist valorization of nature. In addition to social and economic transformations in all aspects of life, it would mean curbing the proliferation of land for production, settlement, and agriculture of monocultures and factory farming that rides on the costs of nature

and wildlife conservation that are firmly promoting CO<sub>2</sub> neutrality as well as.

The crisis also indicates that neoliberal globalization has overexpanded chains of production and supply. It doesn't make sense to transport products around the globe because of tax advantages or a minimally higher margin of profit. It doesn't make sense to travel thousands of kilometres for a business meeting or a holiday. And it is not right that products that are necessary for society are only being produced in China or India—and this includes medicines, face masks, and medical equipment. The (overly) intensified circulation of global capitalism enabled the virus to spread so quickly in the first place. As an example, global tourist industry more than doubled between 2003 (the SARS outbreak due to SARS-CoV1) and 2020 (COVID-19 pandemic due to SARS-CoV2).<sup>2</sup>

### 1 // The End of Business as Usual as an Opportunity for the Left?

In the meantime, the coronavirus has simultaneously switched off capitalism's autopilot mode in a number of countries—at least for a few weeks. This presents a great challenge as it means that important social issues need to be consciously negotiated, initially at least: Which activities, services, and products are those that truly are »essential«? During the financial crisis, it was the banks that were »too big to fail«, but now it is »officially« the cashiers, nurses, technicians, and bus drivers, etc. who are »essential«.

Given the rapidly developing situation in the news, it is becoming apparent to a number of people that the appropriate mode to address pressing challenges for humanity is not to allow individual interests for the maximum utilization of capital to dominate. Here is a selection of absurdities: seeing as they didn't want to shut down the ski season in Ischgl (Austria), they kept the lifts in operation, thereby turning it into a hub for the spread of corona. Faced with the crisis, business and governments try to purchase all the protective materials and respirators before others do, thereby driving the prices up. First, the USA tried to buy the German vaccine company CureVac so that it could produce a potential vaccine exclusively for US Americans—»America first« in the corona era. Then, General Motors, the largest manufacturer of automobiles in the country, was forced by martial law to switch their production to urgently needed ventilators since GM wanted to realize astronomical prices—just like pharmaceutical companies in the US simply doubled the prices for medicinal products related to COVID-19. Here in Germany, people are hesitant to switch the lines of production to protective clothing so long as there is no guarantee that the goods will be accepted for a longer duration, and thus people are making sober calculations whether it wouldn't be easier to just wait a couple of weeks to continue manufacturing cars to earn money. At the same time, the market has »adjusted« such

that local prices for breathing masks have increased nineteen-fold. Private clinics are sending some of their staff into short-time working (*Kurzarbeit*) instead of making their capacities and resources available for society's needs. Elsewhere, there is a desperate search to fill staff for the newly built intensive stations.

But these »blossoms« of capitalism should not make us blind to what is also currently taking place. Broad sections of society have accepted the idea that the production of medication and protective equipment should be politically guided according to the needs of the public in case of emergency. Furthermore, solidarity is being organized in neighbourhoods. Managing the health care system for profit is losing favour and becoming increasingly less stable. The proposal to close at least half of Germany's hospitals, an idea submitted in the summer of 2019 by leading health policy makers in the German government in cooperation with the Bertelsmann Foundation, is now absolutely hysterical. In Bogota's metropolitan area, over 120 kilometres of temporary bike lanes were created within two days to relieve the overcrowded public transport system at the expense of car lanes—which means that more was probably done in these two days than in the last twenty years for transitioning to sustainable transportation. In Detroit, striking bus drivers quickly established a temporary free public transport system: tickets will not be checked until the corona crisis is over in



photo: flickr/Phil Roeder ① ② ③

order to keep the drivers safe from infection. General Electric workers are on strike in order to force production to be converted to medical devices. The cessation of »non-essential« production was initiated by unauthorized strikes in Italy (at Fiat as well as in the shipyards, aviation, and arms and steel industries) and poverty revolts forced the implementation of a temporary unconditional basic income. Further unauthorized strikes are taking place to halt production and to demand sick benefits: at Mercedes, Iveco, and Volkswagen in Spain; at Fiat-Chrysler in Sterling Heights, Whole Foods and Amazon in Chicago, New York, and elsewhere in the USA. Until 1st of July 2020, Portugal is granting »express legalization« for all migrants living there,

thereby guaranteeing them full residence rights, including health insurance. In Germany, the debt ceiling (*Schuldenbremse*) has been repealed and an opportunity has been created to break with the longstanding investment backlog of state investments. »The Economist«, the »magazine of British millionaires« (Lenin), warns its class that it will become harder to make the argument that the »magic money tree« does not exist. If central banks promised to fund the government during the coronavirus pandemic, they might ask, then why shouldn't they also fund it [...] to invest in a Green New Deal?« The world is »in the early stages of a revolution in economic policymaking. The state is likely to play a very different role in the economy—not just during the crisis, but long after«.

The corona crisis is being experienced as a collective moment of shock. The German Chancellor has called it the greatest challenge facing the country since the Second World War. One of the key lessons being learned right now is that if something is politically desired then politicians are capable of pressing »pause« on entire economic sectors. They are capable of taking action directly and of making changes if they want to. We should keep reminding ourselves—as well as the rest of society—about this in the future. Making a systemic socio-ecological change is a question of will and not of ability. It's a question of how and not whether. With various measures and rescue packages, governments around the world are now

trying to get the economy back on track as quickly as possible and with as little change as possible—just like they did with the austerity politics in 2010, which made it clear that the general public had to bear the costs of the crisis. As such, it is now time to commence with the political struggle of determining the conditions under which »play« will be pressed again—so that the massive state interventions and the billions upon billions of euros in crisis aid can be combined with a paradigm shift in society.

## 2// The corona crisis collides with the crisis of overproduction

The current crisis is hitting capitalist societies at a time when the consequences of the most recent financial and economic crisis are still palpable in a number of countries. The recovery from the 2008–09 recession was mainly driven by growth in China and a handful of other countries that rose in the hierarchy of the international division of labour. In contrast, growth remained weak in the old capitalist centres. The mass movements against austerity politics, which reached their pinnacle with the Occupy and Idignados movements in 2011, suffered defeats and were unable to impose progressive solutions to the crisis in any part of the world. Socialist forces remained weak. In comparison, nationalist, authoritarian, and populist forces became stronger in numerous countries and have even come into power in some.

A new mode of accumulating capital on a higher scale could not be initiated. On the contrary. The corona crisis, which is closing substantial parts of social and economic life, is colliding with a business cycle that is coming to an end (see Solty 2020). The current recession began »after a weak growth cycle of nine years« (Wolf 2020) in the fall of 2019 at the latest. The net investment ratio between 2009 and 2019 was less than five percent of the economic output. This was due in particular to the low level of investment activity by companies (and this in spite of the hype surrounding the so-called digitization). Meanwhile, structural overaccumulation grew in comparison to its level before the economic and financial crisis in 2009. The seemingly endless provision of liquidity from the central banks prevented a more fundamental purge from taking place, and it further encouraged the setup of dangerous financial overaccumulation. In the aftermath, the austerity politics to contain national debt with bank bailouts has curbed growth and driven entire countries into depression. Accordingly, growth in Germany averaged 1.3 percent per year between 2008 and 2018, and fell last year to 0.6 percent.<sup>3</sup>

In contrast to 2007–08, the current crisis was triggered by a slump in production, and not by the lending system (the subprime crisis). Accordingly, industrial production in Germany slumped by almost five percent last year, and global production growth dropped to zero. The leading

factor for this was overproduction due to massive overcapacities in the global auto industry (but also in the chemical and steel industries). For two years now there has been an absolute decline in automotive production. In Germany alone, that is a decline of more than one million cars. The slump in automobile manufacturing was (over)compensated by the enormous expansion of the Chinese market after the 2009 crisis. But now production in China is also falling drastically, with a decline of more than two million units—and this came before the corona crisis (see Wolf).

A massive crisis across different sectors is thus concurrent with an economic cycle that is coming to a close—and now the measures to contain the coronavirus are compounding the simultaneous collapse in supply and demand. Corona is a »crisis accelerator« (Zelik 2020).

Corporate coffers are nevertheless filled to the brim and the crisis will be used to consolidate and expand corporate reach of power with the financial resources provided by the state. Meanwhile, we fear that a number of small and medium-sized businesses will not survive the crisis; particularly subcontractors, small and medium-sized factories and retailers, freelancers, and the self-employed. It may be the case that further monopolization results from accumulation profiting from the crisis by plundering the state. In the global financial crisis from 2007 and after, the rescued banks used the state funds as a way to further concentrate and central-

ize capital; and right now, it is already becoming apparent that corporations like Amazon will see drastic gains in their market shares because of the lockdown.

To date, the German government has planned to provide aid through state loans, subsidies, and the deferral of tax payments (see Sablowski 2020a). More than 36,000 people applied for the Corona Emergency Aid within a short period of time in Berlin alone. Many of them will never be able to repay these outstanding financial obligations due to the decline in their income. In contrast to 2009 and thereafter, the savings banks and credit unions will be much more affected than the big banks that are active in the investment branch. The inevitable recession could be extended into 2021 from a wave of bankruptcies and a crisis of consumption due to declining incomes and a lack of investments as a result. Added to that is the threat of bankruptcies in the shipping, aviation, gastronomy (as has already been the case with the restaurant chains Vapiano and Maredo), tourist, and other sectors.

The crisis is also hitting Europe a time when the eurozone continues to be unstable. Since the outbreak of the Euro crisis in 2009, the European elites have not been able to mitigate the centrifugal forces of the single currency zone with structures that distribute the risks, despite numerous opportunities. Quite the opposite: the expansion of instruments of austerity politics has created an ample structure for surveillance and sanctions,

which exacerbates the contradictions within the eurozone. The debate regarding deepening the economic and monetary union, which has been ongoing since 2012, largely ebbed away or broke down from the resistance put up by the Northern European bloc, headed by Germany. Following the German ordoliberal model of stability union (*Stabilitätsunion*), this bloc has prevented every attempt by France to pair a political union together with a monetary union (Syrovatka/Schneider 2019).

The fact that the Southern European call for common Eurobonds was once again rejected in the midst of a major crisis in the EU clearly reveals the balance of power within the European economic project. While Eurobonds or temporary Corona Bonds would have enabled cheap refinancing of the countries most severely affected by the corona pandemic and thus a fair distribution of the costs of the crisis within the eurozone, the Northern European countries have been insisting on financing the countries in crisis with the European Stability Mechanism (ESM). This means, however, that the relief funds remain conditional rather than guaranteed and that the corset of austerity persists in the medium term. Added to that is the fact that the ESM only has a volume of 410 billion euros at the moment, which is likely to be insufficient given the banking and financial systems in a number of eurozone countries that are still fragile (Schneider/Syrovatka 2020).



Supermarket in Sheffield, UK, March 2020, photo: flickr/Tim Dennell ① ⑤

The balance sheets of European banks continue to hide nonperforming loans to a total of 786 billion euros—one in ten loans in Italy is at risk of defaulting (European Central Bank 2020). The lockdown constitutes a considerable burden for the Italian banking system, and it seems likely from our current point of view that a number of Italian banks will collapse. This, however, threatens to create a vicious cycle of crises related to banking and national debt; something which would endanger the monetary union and thus the entire European project.

National bankruptcy threatens a number of nations outside the EU as well, especially those countries that are heavily dependent on single export products or that have a weak production structure. Elsewhere, entire industries are on the brink of collapse. The fracking industry in North America, for instance, has become unprofitable due to the continuing drop

in oil prices. The potential collapse of the Chinese shadow banking system could even destabilize China more than the financial crisis ten years prior had. Unlike in 2009, China will not be able to save the world economy by means of expanding its market at an unprecedented level. There is a small chance, if the country that was hit first is able to quickly cope with the effects of the crisis and get the economy rolling again. But this will not be enough for an export boom in Germany like back then.

### 3 // The corona crisis is strengthening the political executive and defensive of the left

Exceptional circumstances have always been the moment of the executive authority. Right now is not the time for the left to go on the offensive. Instead, we are on the structural defensive, even though left-wing movements have been increasingly successful in putting essential ecological and social issues on the agenda in recent years. Uprisings like #unteilbar, Fridays for Future, or those against the TTIP (free trade agreement) demonstrate the significant potential for left-wing mobilization in the German society and beyond. And yet, virologists and the government are currently dominating the media discourse. It is even more difficult than usual for the social left as well as Die LINKE (Left Party) to become visible and remain that way. Many pivotal leftist practices are currently shut down, including demonstrations, regular strikes, organizing in neighbourhoods and at front

doors. Social movements—such as Fridays for Future—are relegated to social media. They are unable to add pressure for their causes on the streets and are uncertain in how to go about things. Trade unions, in particular, find themselves under pressure to put their alleged »special interests« (such as the struggle to raise wages or for better working conditions) on the backburner in order to avoid putting even more burden on the companies that are already faltering in the crisis. Impending collective bargaining rounds are hardly compatible with infection control and are thus being postponed. What would be necessary now would be greater emphasis on the political mandate of trade unions. The current debate regarding premium payments in caregiving and retail—at least in those areas that are »essential«—demonstrates that what had previously been inconceivable is feasible now. Nevertheless, the central question will be whether the trade unions will succeed in developing new forms of collective action in order to continue asserting their severely weakened organizational power. The same goes for Die LINKE. Although it turns out that many of the issues they raise (above all healthcare and housing) are proving to be more relevant than ever, in a situation like this opportunities and practices are lacking that would make them more visible from the left. Surveys from USA to Germany—very different countries, indeed—show that despite the delayed reactions of governments to the COVID-19 crisis as

well as their responsibility in making the neoliberal cuts to the healthcare systems, the governments are the ones who have so far benefited from the COVID-19 crisis—regardless of whether or not they talk incredible nonsense like Trump or Boris Johnson or act more or less reliable and rational like Merkel.

Just as in 2008/9, neoliberal dogmas are being wiped away every day in this crisis, yet this is only being done to save and stabilize an ailing capitalism with no horizon (at least as far as accumulation on an extended scale as well as a convincing project of political hegemony are concerned)<sup>4</sup>, to then muddle along with more or less authoritarian means. Authoritarian regimes such as those in Hungary or Poland are consistently heading towards authoritarianism and suspending democratic rights, which, as Hungary demonstrates, can even go as far as suspending parliamentarism or the freedom of the press. In many respects, this situation is becoming a »field for experimentation« (Becker 2020) for authoritarian government technologies. In Germany, it is »flexible risk management« acting on »a limited scope« that is prevailing instead (ibid.). There are stay-at-home orders and contact bans, restrictions on the life of the economy, but not excessive ones. There's a little less freedom here and there, a little more money for the health sector, as well as less political rights in general and less rights for trade unions (strikes and demonstrations have been made impossible), etc. For some, this is

an example of policy acting with good judgment—it is more liberal than in other countries—but for others, it demonstrates delayed and inconsistent action. Both are right. Politically, this action strengthens the ruling executive as well as the leading parties in governments. It does not have to stay this way.

This is because the state is demonstrating its capacity to act as well as an actionism that gives the »impression of acting« (Pühl). The state often reacts too late, and it often does not have the capacities to act since the public sector has been thinned out and emaciated in the last 40 years. Whether it be emergency services, the Agency for Technical Relief, public health departments, or even hospitals, administrations and infrastructures are no longer capable of providing their services. The lean neoliberal state reached its limits a long time ago. This is also becoming more apparent.

And, there are also discursive openings. With regards to the balance of power, the left appears to be on the defensive, yet there are windows of opportunity to make some form of progress in other areas. It is still uncertain whether the crisis will develop in such a way that the seemingly stable executive branch will stumble in the end—yet, we need to be prepared for it. Either way, we have to use this window of opportunity while also highlighting, discussing, and organizing a perspective that reaches even further. This is not an »either/or« of achieving a voluntaristic »jackpot«

or a pragmatic »small potatoes«. Instead, it unites practices of resistance and concrete entry projects with strategic perspectives. The specific constellation of the various, intertwined crises is unprecedented, the process of condensation (Poulantzas) remains open—and therefore its difficult to predict. Under no circumstances should things just return to the way they had been before the crisis. There can be no »going back«: »we won't return to normality because normality was the problem«, as the protests last year in Chile had it.

A two-pronged strategy needs to be developed: on the one hand, it is a question of critically supporting the government measures to stabilize important social realms and protect larger sections of the population from the worst possible and immediate consequences of the acute situation of the crisis—as well as to raise one's voice and seek opportunities for intervention whenever this does not prove to be enough. On the other hand, we have to make very clear that returning to the status quo from before, even in a modified form, as well as a steady course of action, like the Grand Coalition is attempting to do, would be wrong once the worst symptoms of the crisis have passed. A repetition of the policies from 2008/09 must be avoided at all costs.

Assuming that the acute crisis flattens, it is expected that the long-term assessment of the consequences of the crisis and the 2021 Bundestag elections will simultaneously become the focal

point of national politics in the summer. This makes it possible for this Bundestag election to turn into a choice—it even demands it. There are two possibilities: either the ruling power bloc emerges from the crisis more consolidated and integrated or the lines of division become stronger again. Trade unions as well as other social and ecological forces can concentrate on pushing versions of what they had previously been pursuing. Or they could also focus on an alternative scheme and work towards that.

A number of social forces are currently submitting proposals for a change in direction that is social, democratic, ecological, global, and European while also demonstrating global solidarity. This is a great opportunity. Work should already be taking place to create a platform for joining these proposals together and for developing them into a common force that would unite diverse positions and coordinate discussions and actions.

»Essential« is the new buzzword in English, but in German they speak of »systemic importance« (Systemrelevanz). This term refers to the work that is socially necessary from the perspective of reproducing this society and keeping it together, the basic needs of individuals and of society as a whole. The work of the many that keeps everyone alive, which also includes in the realms of social infrastructure and the unpaid work that is predominantly performed by women in (»adopted«) families and households. For

us, this cannot signify the preservation of the »system«, of what is wrong, the very thing that we, speaking from a socialist perspective, are trying to overcome. As such, society and the (capitalist) system are not being equated. The language of the media cannot be merely duplicated. Instead, it can be critically used in a discursive struggle for hegemony, in a shift in the realtions of power, in a change of system, the other, that should be speakable once more (Candeias 2019b). This is because numerous problems, some of which have been apparent for a long time already, are revealing themselves with particular clarity: what had previously perceived as being abstract or only as urgent to those who were directly affected is now being revealed to most people as a fragile existence, life itself.

#### 4 // Worried subjectivities, social certainties in question

The deep incisions in daily routines are having (socio-psychological) implications that are difficult to understand at this point. Despite the spontaneous solidarity in families, circles of friends, apartment buildings, and neighbourhoods, it is clear that the social and cultural infrastructure is not robust. Inequalities in the school system are to be expected, and the ministers of education and cultural affairs have even hinted at them with reference to the grading of school reports. There are many variables that prevent households from being able to facilitate

»home schooling«: cramped spaces and a lack of hardware are but two factors that amplify educational inequalities as a result of the parents' social backgrounds and professional circumstances. In general, it cannot be predicted how a prolonged break in everyday routines and an enduring situation of insecurity, etc. will be dealt with on a socio-psychological level. In addition to psychological deprivations or the increase in domestic violence, there is a growing willingness to shut out risk groups, which hinders their desired rapid return to normal life in the name of taking care of them: this is a potential reaction that should be prevented. A third set of implications of the subjective worries might be the relationship to public transport: could it lead to a renaissance of people driving alone in cars since there is more protection from strangers? Observing such »subtle« subjective reactions to this currently unpredictable disruption will be indispensable in making adequate records of social moods and conditions for political strategies.

The insecurity also applies to our own psychological and physical conditions as political subjects of the left and socialist movements. The situation calls for action, for necessary changes—right now. At the same time, our (already limited) ability to act has been limited by the situation, subjectivity has become unsure. Added to that are fears for our own well-being, for those of our loved ones, for the state of the left, for the entire world. There is a

pressing need to find (self)orientation, and the abundance of both information and interpretations is dizzying. The easy access to the media (particularly to the internet) not only offers a way to communicate and to keep ties of solidarity, but also is a moment of uncertainty. From all of this arises the danger of overload, resignation, paralysis, and even excessive voluntarism.

This can lead to a sense of agitation that is not only difficult to bear as individuals, but that also affects organizations on the left as a whole. Regardless of the resources that organizations or individuals possess—which, again, are severely limited by the current situation—the dynamics and pressure to act—now, more, with more decisiveness—threaten to override our own subjectivity, its suffering, and reproductive needs (once again). To quote Gramsci, there is a need of »sober, patient people« who »do not despair in the face of the worst horrors and who do not become exuberant with every silliness«. But there's also a need for people who take care of one another. Solidarity in a wider sense. Maybe this will prove to be an opportunity for a left that is all too happy to be divided.

### **STRATEGIES IN THE CRISIS**

The corona crisis is hitting healthcare systems that have been starved and privatized for years, leading to a systematic deepening of two-tier health systems, a class system in health. The capacities of these sectors have been dramatically

reduced to their minimum since 2009, particularly in the Southern European countries most affected by the crisis. But it isn't only in Italy where the number of hospital beds has dramatically fallen. Hundreds of hospitals with hundreds of thousands of beds have closed in Germany as well. As late as the summer of 2019, the Bertelsmann Stiftung made headlines by announcing that better care would be possible in Germany with only half as many hospitals. The foundation called for reducing the number of clinics from around 1,400 to less than half—namely, to 600 hospitals. Since introducing flat-rate payments in 2004, 50,000 nursing jobs have been cut. While the numbers of cases in hospitals has risen—that is, the number of treatments—the length of stay for the patients has continuously dropped. Together with a reduction in staffing, particularly of nursing staff, the workload to maintain hospitals has dramatically increased. The number of nursing staff has risen again in recent years, but it is not keeping pace with the rapidly increasing demand (see Heintze/Troost/Ötsch 2020). This results in an unacceptable workload for individuals. A considerable portion of nursing personnel in Germany are from Poland and Czechia (this is particularly true in Eastern Germany federal states) or they were recruited from countries like Greece, Serbia, Bosnia, or the Philippines—thereby resulting in a lack of such staff in their home countries.

## DEVELOPMENTS IN THE HEALTH SECTOR

	1994	2010	2020	Absolute change	Change in percentage	Goal 2030
Population	81.5 million	81.7 million	83.1 million	+1.6 million	+2%	
Number of hospitals	2,337	2,064	1,938	-399	-17%	950
Number of beds	615,000	500,000	490,000	-125,000	-20.3 %	400,000
Hospital beds per 100,000 inhabitants	754.6	612	589.7	-164.9	-21.8 %	

Source: W. Wolf, 2020b

The pandemic is a reminder to everyone that basic social infrastructures are not able to function like this. And in fact, this was the lesson of the Spanish Influenza 100 years ago, where Sweden, for instance, invented the modern welfare state with a public healthcare system.

Large segments of the population are becoming aware of who and what is vital and indispensable for one's personal provision of basic supplies as well as for the fundamental infrastructure used by the public at large. The culture of »applauding« as well as the one-off bonuses are expressions of this awareness. It seems conceivable to turn the experiences of this crisis into a sustainable lesson that could be practically applied in order to change people's perceptions and frameworks for understanding society. Reconstructing social life according to necessity not only requires modifications in production sites and supply chains, but also changes in the primary distribution of income—between capital and labour as well as within labour

itself: the wage scale of occupations required for the satisfaction of basic needs should be upgraded in relation to other occupations. It is not only a question of valuing these professions. It is also a question of making them attractive. What is socially necessary will be more expensive for us in the future, at least in the form of social security contributions and taxes. The unparalleled situation of the current crisis offers a chance to create an alliance between wage-earners and smaller self-employed businesses across classes and social strata in order to overcome classical class divisions. As both ver.di's negotiations with care facilities and the measures of some of the state governments are testifying, such alliances can create immediate precedents. Well-calculated and sustainable interventions in the primary distribution could gamble on the acceptance that continues to grow and they could become a strategic lever for further transformations geared towards the common good.

In what follows, spheres of activity will be outlined where tactical and strategic action should be taken in order to use this window of opportunity in the public discourse. But also to *explore existing opportunities to shift the relations of power*. In order to translate this into concrete policy, the actors involved are faced with a number of questions, and these questions must be approached tactically and strategically to best make use of this window of opportunity in public discourse. *Where can we make demands that are immediately reasonable and leftist? Which ones are suitable for campaigns? How can they be connected with broader transformative or socialist perspectives? What productive conflicts and clear references to opponents need to be made in order to do so?* (see Candeias 2019a).

### **1 // Health and social infrastructures: needs-based and public**

The most obvious sector lacking infrastructure is the health sector. To many people it was clear even before the crisis that things could not go on like this. And now nurses (as well as cashiers and couriers)—not necessarily women, but primarily so—are being heralded as national heroes, but they are only receiving symbolic recognition. The aim now would be to combine this symbolic recognition with an improvement in working conditions, and to do this with a criticism of the system of flat rates per case (Diagnosis Related Groups, DRGs), which is responsible for years of shortages in hospitals. DRGs are being

heavily criticized at the moment, and not only by the nurses who have gone on strike in recent years. Even the health companies and hospital operators demand their suspension. Ver.di is also making a reference to a fundamental critic of this financial model. A shift in the political balance of power is thus becoming apparent and it needs to be driven forward. After all, the German DRG system has fallen into disrepute in society. The first steps out of the DRG system have been taken due to such pressure from below; including, eliminating costs for nursing care based on DRGs and the introduction of so-called reserve costs for »additional« treatment capacities (and thus a departure from an orientation focused on revenue). These measures need to be radicalized through demands for staff assessment, alternative needs assessments, planning, and financing. A broad consensus that recognized the importance of nursing staff has the chance to spread knowledge about common healthcare problems to a broader public.

A first step in this direction would be campaigns demanding an immediate bonus of 500 euro a month for all »essential workers«, as ver.di, Die LINKE, and others have called for. But this can only be the first step towards raising their wages in general. It is also a matter of significantly raising the standards for staffing (see Gernhardt 2020 for a detailed description). In light of the blatant lack of nursing staff at the moment, this could only be achieved if a number of qualified staff members returned to

their professions under better conditions or if young people could imagine taking up this attractive profession. The fact that moderate successes in this branch—such as setting a bare minimum of staff members on duty—are once again being suspended during the corona crisis, and this is exactly the opposite of what would be necessary. After all, these limits only stipulate the bare minimum of staff members for specific situations of care. They do not even ensure the prevention of »malpractice«. The disposal of this bare minimum, which was already dangerous, has nothing to do with »good« care. Instead, the predominantly female employees' ethos of care (see Dück 2020) is invoked in an attempt to squeeze out every last resource from the already exhausted nurses. At this moment the public discourse could shifted in favour of winning improvements in this field.

The universal experience of vulnerability, of the existential reliance on contact, attention, tenderness, and care—or, in contrast, the sudden lack of all this—may also make people more receptive to feminist concerns, or may open discursive spaces to go on the offensive with concrete demands. The pressure cooker reality of working in home office should make it clear to many people just how times-consuming and varied household management and care work are—but also how difficult it is to reconcile the different time logics and emotional and cognitive requirements with an even moderately productive day of gainful employment. And this only applies to those

who are able to work in home office in the first place. For others—and perhaps in the broader social perspective—this situation makes it clear that domestic work is in fact the work that »makes all other work possible« (Domestic Workers Alliance). When preschools and schools are closed, when grandparents are not available to help, then production mostly comes to a standstill—something that educators on strike a few years ago had dreamt of in vain.

Still others are cut off from every form of care and attention in this situation. If city administrations suddenly rent entire hotels out to provide shelter for the rapidly increasing number of women and children affected by domestic violence, then there is a chance that sustainable demands will be made here as well: more attention to the issue of domestic violence in general, evidence demonstrating its direct relation to social and economic crises (as well as to the crisis of gender relations), and to the structural underfunding of this domain in particular. Healthcare policy should be understood as politics again and solidarity should be understood as an element of social conflicts.

Ultimately, hospitals (or the collectivization of large hospital and nursing groups) need to be de-privatized, since it is becoming apparent that economizing and privatizing lead to poor results and diminished quality standards. Private clinics are shutting their doors and refusing to open their facilities to treat COVID-19 patients in the current crisis. But right now, all sche-

duled, i.e. elective, treatments need to be cancelled so that there are greater capacities in the intensive care units and so that there is enough qualified staff available to work in these units. A number of the clinics that have recently shut their doors still exist—they're just empty. It would be important to put them into service right away if possible. The number of intensive care beds with the appropriate equipment should be doubled in the short and long term.

Even the Minister of Health Jens Spahn shares this opinion (but only for now, of course). »Currently, there are around 28,000 intensive care beds in operation. This could be increased to 40,000 by the beginning of April. But doubling the beds will also mean needing four times as many qualified members of staff to operate these beds. Where are more than 100,000 additional nursing professionals going to be found?« (Gernhardt 2020). Additional! According to a study by the Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung, there was already a shortage of at least 100,000 nursing professionals in hospitals and geriatric care before the corona crisis (Heintze/Ötsch/Troost 2020). Health campaigns like those of Die LINKE have long been calling for more staff. The current crisis has made particularly clear just how dire the staffing situation is in geriatric care. The work must therefore immediately be made more attractive with job guarantees, better pay, good working conditions, faster ways to train and reactivate staff, quick training for additional staff who will then be able to continue their

regular training in the following year with the guarantee of continued employment, as well as a medium-term expansion of the training capacities for nursing staff.

One vital component of this will be the public health departments. They have experienced a decrease of around 30 percent of their medical staff alone in the past twenty years. At least 5,500 positions are currently unstaffed (Heintze/Troost/Ötsch 2020, 11). The public health departments will be a vital component in the current, acute COVID-19 pandemic as well as in the future so that a health care system that passes the pandemic stress test can be constructed.

Seeing as the peak of the infection is only expected in July or August of this year, the personnel capacities of the private clinics and offices would need to be integrated into the general health service immediately. The goal in the future should be to eliminate two-tier medicine (Zwei-Klassen-Medizin) and private health insurance. Another goal would be the (re)establishment and democratization of a public health sector, as well as furnishing polyclinics and regional or local health centres with care and health councils. Eliminating private insurance in favour of a public single-payer healthcare as well as the de-privatization of healthcare facilities have the potential to be a clear counter manoeuvre and they could create a productive social conflict so that the left receives more visibility amidst the dominance of crisis management. Spahn, the Minister of Health, is the »weakest link« in the whole government apparatus and is an



open target for criticism. Not only does he—like many who held the office before him—stand in for a thinned-out health sector, but he is also advocating the digitalization and computerization of medicine in the spirit of further economization and human alienation, which is decidedly in the interest of the capital groups of IT and healthcare companies.

Even before the crisis, disputes about the healthcare system were already being fought out in the movement for increasing the number of staff in hospitals, which took the shape of social alliances, referendums, and successful collective bargaining. At the beginning of the corona crisis, employees in some clinics (see the interview with Ost 2020) started voicing their professional opinions and interests on crisis management in a way that effectively drew attention

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to them; two petitions received more than 500,000 signatures (<https://weact.campact.de/petitions/COVID-19-gesundheitsarbeiterinnen-fordern-menschen-vor-profiten>; [www.change.org/p/covid2019-gemeinsamer-pfle-gefachkr%C3%A4fte-auf-ruf-an-jens-spahn-illner](http://www.change.org/p/covid2019-gemeinsamer-pfle-gefachkr%C3%A4fte-auf-ruf-an-jens-spahn-illner)) and the first victories in securing bonuses were achieved. In the autumn, the Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung will prepare a council on care to further organize cooperative campaigns in this direction alongside these invigorated activists from trade unions, movements, and parties. In general, the importance of social infrastructures has once again become evident and even more explicit. No one can deny what is indispensable or »essential« any longer. So: keep going. Infrastructure socialism is obviously wise, simple, and doable (see Candeias 2020).



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## 2 // A protective screen for the people and the end of the debt ceiling

While the absurdity of the debt ceiling becomes clearer, a window of opportunity presents itself in Germany to fight against it. A campaign ensuring that the black zero policy does not return after the crisis must seize this opportunity.

The government took necessary but insufficient measures at the beginning of the crisis. The short-time work benefits assist a number of companies in survival. But faced with the sector and general economic crises, a number of companies—big corporations in particular—will use the corona crisis to implement the deadweight effect via the short-time work for the staff that they no longer needed anyway; for instance, in the auto industry.

Once the crisis measures are discontinued, they are likely to make massive staff cuts to adjust their employment needs (as they did in 2009 and onwards). Particularly in the auto industry—but not only—the trend is to increase employment in places closer to the major sales markets, i.e. in the new capitalist centres, such as in China, India or even the USA, or to continue outsourcing to Eastern Europe while simultaneously downsizing in Germany.

Nevertheless, a number of companies are trying to keep their businesses running. Strikes are taking place—under difficult conditions for trade unions—in Italy, Spain, or the USA, because people are afraid of risking their lives for non-essential goods and services, such as in call centres, package delivery companies, or factories for luxury products. Here

in Germany, the debate regarding what constitutes socially necessary work in this situation needs to be held: what classifies as essential and what doesn't? (See Sablowski 2020; Luig 2020)

In this crisis, the short-time work benefits ensure an adequate income for some but not all. In the low-wage sector, millions of people will fall under the poverty line as a result—that is, if they were even above it to begin with. It is not without reason that ver.di and Die LINKE are calling for the short-time work benefits to be increased to 90% of wages, with a base of 1200 EUR, so that people with low incomes will also have security. This would require an unbureaucratic disbursement as well as an increase of Hartz IV unemployment benefits, especially for those who are losing their jobs and have nothing else to claim. The Association of German Writers has called for a reduction in the minimum level of earnings at least temporarily for social security (in this case, for the German Artist's Social Security Fund (KSK), which is also responsible for a number of other freelance professions) as well as an emergency fund for cultural workers and businesses whose existences are threatened. This would have to be broadened to include a solidarity-based basic income of 1200 EUR for every other small business owners and self-employed persons during the crisis.

Even though the government's measures to defer rent payment (including commercial rent) and loans has

been sensible, deferring rent alone isn't enough: many people are threatened by a massive drop in income after losing jobs or contracts. Even if one is able to claim short-time work benefits, many low-wage workers do not have the funds to pay rents that have been deferred (with interest).

There needs to be an immediate halt to evictions and power cuts without exception—and this is already being implemented in part, but only until end of June. Everyone needs to be provided with an adequate living space so that they can protect themselves and others from infection. With relevant laws in the federal states, the empty housing stock and hence the holiday apartments and hotel rooms that are currently vacant could be registered and used. It is often impossible for people living on the streets or in homeless shelters to keep the prescribed distance from one another—and the same can be said of those living in prison or the so-called »anchor centres«, the central accommodations for refugees. The same goes for those who are infected but are not showing any serious symptoms, so that they do not infect the people in their household, especially in nursing homes for the elderly.

Furthermore, a rent moratorium is needed for people who have lost their jobs or income. »No jobs. No payments. No rent«, is one slogan from movements in the USA, where the share of households paying rent has already sunk to 69 percent in April (in contrast to 81 percent in the

previous month, according to the National Multifamily Housing Council, a national council for landlords). Real estate groups like Deutsche Wohnen, which recently reported a profit of 1.6 billion euros in 2019, will be able to get past this. Landlords operating on a smaller scale who are in trouble themselves as a result of the crisis could receive unbureaucratic help with state-guaranteed (e.g. KfW) low-interest loans with a long-term validity. Supporting tenants by giving them easier access to social services and covering higher rents is support for profit-oriented business models (Unger 2020). Instead of making the housing industry share the costs of the crisis, its expected returns and speculative prices are being covered by the state.

This crisis makes it painstakingly clear that the general applicability of collective bargaining agreements that has long been demanded in retail trade (including Amazon) or the logistics sector and delivery services—but not limited to them—would be as sensible of a measure as the risk premiums that are truly essential. These jobs should be recognized as such, meaning better conditions for these workers should be created on a permanent basis.

But how can such a »protective screen for the people« (Becker 2020) be financed? A temporary special levy is needed as is the overdue introduction of a wealth tax. The deficits in the public sector's ability to act, which has become apparent in this crisis, call for a fundamental tax reform.

This is more than justified given the scale of the crisis and it can build on the lessons learned after the Second World War. The 100 largest listed companies in Germany had 81 billion euros of profit in 2019. As a result of tax reforms in the 1990s, the number of millionaires in Germany doubled to over a million between 2000 and 2018—the number of billionaires is 126. Employees are supposed to make ends meet with sixty percent of their wages from the short-time work benefits, and so the propertied class can also do its part: like in the last crisis, a one-off capital levy totalling five percent of every euro above the two million mark would be necessary, preferably throughout all of Europe—but someone has to take the first step somewhere. This did not take place back then and even today there is a low probability that the Grand Coalition will decide to take such measures. In addition to this, it would be necessary to introduce a permanent wealth tax or millionaire tax of five percent on all assets or 75 percent on every euro of income above two million. This can also be constitutionally justified in light of the greatest wealth disparity<sup>6</sup> in the history of the country. The richest ten percent—and particularly the richest one percent—need to be involved in adequately financing the broader community once again.

In the medium term, therefore, there needs to be a higher premium income for social security and a higher tax revenue in accordance with respective capacity, also for special burdens<sup>7</sup>. What would

be appropriate for the latter would be an »equalization of burdens« for the public infrastructure in crisis situations—similar to the housing question from 1949. An income and corporate tax reform cannot be avoided from the left.

After all, such a tax is even being called for by the chairwoman of the coalition-partner SPD. Whether her finance minister shares the same view is doubtful. But it shows who takes such changes of direction seriously and who wants to call on the wealthy to finance the public sector again—that is, who wants to return the social surplus product to the general public. If not during a crisis like this, then when?

### **3 // Investment offensive and socio-ecological system change—now!**

The German government's rescue measures for the crisis have in no way addressed the need for an investment offensive for socio-ecological structural change and for a (fundamental) economy of social infrastructures. This creates discursive opportunities for left alternatives to bring the idea of an investment offensive to the table.

In the short term, the health care system and especially the hospitals must be financed based on real costs and in a unbureaucratic way, which the current rescue package for the hospitals does not provide (see Dück 2020 for more details). In the medium term, there needs to be a new basis for financing the health sector as

well as the social infrastructure and public services in general. Apart from the construction and expansion of schools, day-care centres, libraries, and cultural facilities, public swimming pools, etc., the number of staff must be increased (with appropriate staff assessment) in order to be able to carry out the required quality of work in these areas. This applies to everyone from educators and teachers, cultural and social workers, etc., to the reconstruction of administrative and planning offices, or even tax auditors in the starved public sector. A study by the RLS estimates that »well over one but not quite four million additional employees« (Heintze/Troost/Ötsch 2020, 6) will be needed.

All in all, the expansion of the public sector would have to be combined with a strengthening of the rights and financing of local municipalities, which should be responsible for providing the most important things in essential sectors of the economy. Municipalities are already particularly affected by the crisis: Revenues are collapsing, and unexpected challenges and expenses have to be dealt with. The German Association of Cities and Towns calculated that 11.5 billion euros worth of emergency aid would be needed (Neues Deutschland, April 8, 2020, p.5). Immediate debt relief on behalf of the federal government as well as a new solidarity pact to restore the municipalities' ability to act should also be implemented. In addition, massive investment funds should be included in the federal government's

climate package, since municipalities are a key tier in socio-ecological transformation. In the future, this could be combined with the expansion of regional economic circuits and a public sector capable of strong regulations, which local parliaments would decide on together with the help of councils, initiatives, and citizens' movements.

In the short term, financial support should be allocated to convert existing production lines so that they can produce the things most urgently needed such as respirators, masks, disinfectants, and other medical products. Donald Trump has already demonstrated how to do this, and some companies have taken initiative to move in this direction on their own. Conversion is not always easy, but independent units of production with flexible programming in particular can be converted quickly.

It has been shown that conversion can happen faster than some people claim, that some segments of production are far more flexible than some people think they are. Aggravated by just-in-time production and international border closures, the COVID-19 crisis in China has suddenly made essential goods scarce. The crisis shows how public healthcare systems are made vulnerable by the system of private, profit-oriented production which requires medical goods to be imported from China in order to cut costs. In a new type of war economy, the COVID-19 crisis is now suddenly forcing

the nation state to mandate production in strategically important sectors. In Germany, Volkswagen, the southern German automotive suppliers Zettl and Sandler, the Thuringian mattress manufacturer Breckle, and the textile groups Trigema, Mey, Eterna, and Kunath are now producing sanitary products such as respiratory masks, while the Jägermeister, Diageo, and Beck's breweries are producing disinfectants. In view of the blatant shortage of ventilators, the Trump administration has now re-instated the Defense Production Act from the time of the Korean War and is forcing General Motors to produce ventilators. Similar things are taking place in Britain, where Conservative Prime Minister Boris Johnson has had to call on British industry to switch their assembly lines from producing cars, aircraft engines, dialysis machines, and excavation equipment to ventilators, since only one company in Britain still produces them. These developments may make the debate on conversion a little easier. We should take advantage of this, even if breakthroughs in public opinion on the matter do not seem apparent. We can build on the experience gained by these companies.

In the long term, a relative decoupling from economic growth will require certain sectors to downsize (e.g. sectors of industrial production associated with high material turnover), while others will initially grow (such as the entire care economy). The shutdown of production

during the crisis is an opportunity to discuss the conversion of industry as a whole.

After the crisis, the economy should not continue as it had before. Not every company should be saved under all circumstances: The ecologically unsustainable expansion of air travel has imploded. Many airlines may not survive. This is an opportunity to nationalize the industry (as was already the case in some countries before the current crisis, e.g. Portugal or currently Italy) in order to reduce its size to a reasonable level, waive appropriate regulations, and offer employees a different perspective (see LuXemburg issue 1/2020, »Bahn frei«).

It will also be crucial to make consistent steps towards a transformation of transport<sup>8</sup>, towards »car-free«, and green cities. These changes are indispensable not only for ecological reasons but also for the re-appropriation of public space<sup>9</sup>. Details are well known: Shifting away from individual transportation towards a massively expanded (and hopefully) »smart« public transportation system for local and long-distance commuting (especially for commuters in »urban-rural« areas), significant price reductions including free public transport, returning businesses and infrastructure to public ownership, better working conditions and wages, giving priority to pedestrians and cyclists, doing away with internal combustion engines. That would mean taking on powerful corporate interests



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and lobbies, and this is the right historical moment to do so.

However, developing a different kind of mobility based around public transport requires first of all several elements of alternative production: the development and expansion of E-bus systems (overhead lines, self-driving, etc.), minibuses and on-call bus services, and of specialized commercial vehicles etc., the production of rail vehicles (suburban and underground trains, trams, regional and long-distance trains, freight trains), smart traffic management systems, the partial construction of energy and rail car infrastructure, the development of ecologically compatible lightweight construction materials, the production of steel with zero carbon emissions, etc. We have only talked about

the essential areas of the metal industry- which would need an estimated 300,000 additional workers- here and not about the large number of workers needed in public transport, railways, or civil engineering for the reconstruction of infrastructures.

The transformation requires an incredible amount of labour power. But this will not always mean that employees will be able to stay with the same company or in the same industry. To ensure that a socio-ecological transformation does not cause anxiety (or is even fought by those affected), the white paper of Die LINKE has formulated a job guarantee: everyone in search of work should have the right to a publicly financed »short full-time« job with collectively agreed wages (see Riexinger 2020). What is being demanded is not just less work, but different kinds of work and the transformation of work itself. Corporations will not participate in this transformation voluntarily. They rely on the valorization of the capital invested and the high profits from SUVs (even electric ones), and as one employee from an auto company put it, they will »ride the horse until it is dead« (see Holzschuh et al. 2020, 7). We should not expect investments in insecure business fields, smaller (e-)cars, or even conversion from them. Accordingly, state funding would have to be used as a lever to advance an alternative production, expand participation in ownership, or even fully socialize companies. Public participation would have to be combined with broad participation of employees, trade unions,

environmental associations, and the people living in the region, e.g. in regional transformation councils that decide on concrete steps towards converting the auto industry into an ecologically oriented producer of public transportation. A transformation like this could only succeed if it was supported by broad participation. The people in the affected regions, especially the employees, know that structural change is coming. It would be good to build on the enormous knowledge and the sense of pride many producers and employees have in the practical value of their work: Are we able to create a socio-ecological transformation of industry that will secure both jobs- not only in the metal sector- and a future on this planet, together?

Perhaps we should go one step further, since socializing the corporations would be an almost impossible task. Even if large government contracts create planning security and private companies could expand production, this remains just an additional segment for the companies and the costs would tend to be higher because of the expected returns. So why not set up a public enterprise for the alternative production of the necessary electric buses, trams, and trains, strictly oriented towards the common good, a »people-owned transportation«, so to speak? That kind of project would have to be taken up at the federal level, but people could start at the regional and municipal levels. Just as the discussion on the construction of housing is moving in the direction of a

building site, municipal associations could initiate their own production sites for different types of e-buses—still Die LINKE is a part of three state governments and various municipalities. The only way to actually achieve the restructuring of the auto industry and the transformation of transportation via an alternative material infrastructure is to change the structure of ownership.

Die Linke has drafted a proposal for what an expansive Green New Deal and a transformation of transport could look like (Riexinger 2020). Sectors like armaments and parts of the chemical industry, for example, would also be candidates for conversion. Transforming the economy is indispensable. If the markets fail to perform their investment function, then this must be taken up in a more public, participatory manner. Mariana Mazzucato shows how in the last forty years, government research programmes and policies rather than companies have created new technologies/productive forces, and even new markets: from the Internet to renewable technologies, to nano or biotechnologies. »In fact, it is the state that is willing to take risks that companies won't. It has proved to be creative, generating entirely new markets and industries« (Mazzucato 2014).

What do we want to invest in? This would be a very good question for a campaign. It would have to include the socialization of innovation, in order to direct the development of the productive forces according to the needs of every-

one rather than to profit. An offensive approach would expose the private sector's incompetence: it can develop all sorts of complicated nonsense, from digital gadgets to weapons, but cannot provide a solution even to simple problems such as producing new materials for cheap and ecological housing<sup>10</sup>. The extraction of ecological (lightweight) materials and substances, the securing of 100 percent renewable energy with corresponding decentralized storage capacities and decreased electricity consumption, the development of smart public transportation systems and the reduction of traffic, the replacement of rare-earth metals by alternative raw materials, ecological cultivation methods to secure food sovereignty in the face of global warming, etc.—these are just a few examples of progressive fronts in innovation that require extensive public investment in basic and applied research.

Like every crisis, this crisis shows once again that it is state and social initiatives rather than the market which can react quickly, ensure the provision of vital needs, calculate demand—but why only in times of crisis? And is it not the case that the climate emergency, the blatant inequality between and within states, the asylum and migration movements are all crises of global proportions, which require a rapid and planned transition to a socio-ecological system change (see also Kühne 2020)? We say »yes«. Even before the COVID-19 crisis, we had already discussed the necessity of an intervention whose scale

and depth would compare at least to the New Deal, and which would be implemented in a short period of about ten years up until 2030 (e.g. Candeias 2019b). To go on like this in and after the crisis would be completely inappropriate to the suppressed human problems.

#### 4 // Offensive for real democracy

Currently, a number of fundamental rights have been restricted and suspended in Germany. At both federal and state levels, the government claims that this is only provisional. The public media reacts calmly and critically. Our immediate situation requires us to accept many of these measures. In our opinion, this includes tracking mobile phone data, so that anonymous contact profiles could be used to warn individuals of the risk of infection. Parliament has not had their rights restricted, nor has the media lost the right to report freely. Academic freedoms have not been formally restricted either: Courses continue to be held (online), and NGOs, trade unions, parties, movement groups, and left-wing social forces can often still pursue their activities—albeit under much more difficult conditions. Freedom of assembly is more difficult, but individual protests have taken place. For these reasons, it would be misguided to speak of a state of emergency in the sense implied by political theory and constitutional law—as when a »state of instrumental measures« suspends fundamental rights. The federal government has

not even imposed emergency legislation. Germany is not Hungary, not even Italy or Spain in that sense. However, accepting these measures critically goes hand in hand with making it clear that exceptions and restrictions of citizens' rights should not become a habit.

Two questions arise: What lessons can be deduced from the apparent deficits we find ourselves in? How can democratic procedures be used to prevent uncertainties in supply etc. and to ensure democratic conditions in crisis situations?

We should use this situation to reactivate reliable instruments of an engaged societal and social politics aimed at securing societal needs. This includes things like monitoring public health and social well-being, participatory forms of budgetary policy, etc. At the very least, these are instruments for generating support for redistribution processes. It is also urgent to ask how the police force could be democratized or what a democratic security policy could look like. A separate field would be dedicated to handling social insurance funds, including the Federal Employment Agency, in the run-up to the crisis and during it. For years, the Associations of Statutory Health Insurance Physicians helped dismantle the health care system (in the case of the health insurance companies, this is contrary to the interests of their members). How to go about democratizing the self-administrative structures that still exist in our social security—which people have been discussing since the

1970's (see Standfest/Ferber 1977)—is certainly still relevant. Doing so would require strengthening the local and regional parliamentary bodies, and demanding that they receive more political influence and real responsibility along with the necessary financial resources.

Democratic decision-making processes must be expanded and restructured to address crisis situations. Our current situation is cause to consider setting up special councils at the local, regional, and federal levels to prepare for future crisis scenarios. During certain emergency situations, citizens could then be called on to participate in the decision-making process (a model comparable to social elections would be conceivable). The local level of democracy must be significantly strengthened, since many of these scenarios involve traffic routes or communication infrastructures collapsing, meaning that repairs cannot happen in a timely manner. In concrete terms, this also means strengthening municipal budgets and reorienting the staffing of municipalities to prioritize meeting needs over financial viability.

Easing of on social distancing, return of civil rights? Prerequisites and dilemmas Although there are currently signs that the number of cases is decreasing in some European countries, nobody can predict how the crisis will develop. However, it is clear that no society can cope with sustained restrictions on social, public, and economic life as well as restrictions on

human contact in the way we are currently experiencing them. How to deal with this is a controversial matter. Some people are angry about the stay-at-home orders and economic restrictions. They consider them to be factually unjustified, scientifically unsupported, and see violations of the constitution and of civil liberties. Meanwhile, others are afraid that these measures will be lifted. Still others only see the enforcement of the pursuit of profit at the expense of human life in the demand to lift the restrictions, and fear that it could lead to massive discrimination against risk groups (especially the elderly).

But some prerequisites must be met before we can begin a productive debate about possible ways of responding: firstly, much wider availability of low-threshold testing options for detecting acute infections (similar to the drive-thrus in South Korea), with timely results, in order to be able to detect infections quickly and easily, and to be able to approach the quarantine of infected persons in a much more targeted manner. In particular, employees who have daily contact with numerous people—in supermarkets, hospitals, retirement/nursing homes, doctors' offices, delivery services, in the logistics sector, etc.—would have to be tested regularly and provided with adequate health protection at their workplace (masks, protective clothing where necessary, practicable safety distancing, no compulsory presence for the employees in risk groups).

The second prerequisite would be an expansive and uncomplicated procedure for administering antibody tests, with the aim of identifying those who—according to the current state of scientific knowledge—are immune to this variant of the virus and can act accordingly. This process could even provide important assistance, for example in the event of supply bottlenecks for risk groups and in social or medical hot spots. Above all, the cross-sectional studies of populations, which have now finally begun, must be pushed forward in order to obtain scientifically sound statistics on the actual spread of the virus in society, on infected persons without symptoms, infected persons with symptoms, persons who tested negatively, the number of persons who died normally, those who died with the coronavirus, and those who died because of the coronavirus. Of course, there must be an adequate production and distribution of protective clothing as well as adequate staff.

Having these two prerequisites met would provide a solid basis for discussing the following proposals: a proportionate easing of some of the measures and restrictions might help people meet their needs as well as bring democratic practices, social contacts, and a lively civil society back into everyday life. It will also prevent people from growing accustomed to authoritarian measures. The situation in the hospitals should determine what a proportionate response looks like. Once the number of infections—and especially

the critical cases—has fallen, a controlled re-opening can provide breathing space while also possibly leading to the number of cases increasing again. As long as there is no vaccine, this kind of immunization is indispensable. The top priority in doing this would be to actively protect the vulnerable sections of the population, for example by providing sluice rooms in front of old people's homes and providing more tests for those who have a lot of contact with this risk group. This applies to nursing staff as well as to family members or children who want to visit their relatives so that they are no longer isolated. This is a completely different approach than the utilitarian and misanthropic statements made by some (mostly male) right-wing populist politicians, who fantasize about whether older people should not be let die to save the economy. If a careful re-opening then leads to an increase in the number of confirmed cases which places a heavy strain on the health care systems, social distancing measures and restrictions would have to be re-instated. China seems to be choosing this path of alternating restriction and re-opening.

Another option would be to identify regional or local hot-spots of infection and declare them quarantine zones, and enforcing social distancing, with stay-at-home orders if necessary (Schrappe et al. 2020). The advantage of this would be that in other parts of the country, social and economic life would be resumed,



production and supply of the necessary things would be secured, and civil rights would be fully restored. At the same time, hot-spots where the health care facilities are overburdened could be relieved by transferring patients to less burdened facilities in other regions.

Both options still leave many factors unknown in terms of restoring public health. Since the effects of loosening restrictions can only be ascertained after a two to three-week delay, there could be such dramatic consequences that the lost time for containment can no longer be recovered due to possible drastic consequences. A second round of shut-downs lasting weeks would be difficult to enforce, which increases the risk that the state would resort to repressive instruments of crisis management to do so. Therefore, certain conditions and criteria would have to be fulfilled in order

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to gradually ease the current restrictions according to regional circumstances. A detailed exposition of these criteria must be the subject of an urgent social debate, which has already been initiated. However, loosening restrictions and returning to »normality« (which was already problematic before) without demanding precise prerequisites be fulfilled is only the veiled form of the merciless survival of the fittest.

We find ourselves in a dilemma, since maintaining the current measures any longer will take a large toll on the democratic, social, and economic constitution of society. Even the authors of this text remain divided on this issue. What's at stake is not a choice between profit and health, but between the human costs on both sides. Concretely this means

weighing the danger of overburdening the health systems and thus risking much suffering including avoidable deaths from COVID-19 if things become even more severe, versus the dangers to life caused by social isolation and mental illness, increased domestic violence, impoverishment, etc. The fact that people on the left have always fought to prevent the anti-social effects of a crisis like this from arising in the first place does not change the fact that these effects now strike with all their might.

Now, there is heavy pressure on chancellor Merkel, coming from capital and some prime ministers in the federal states of Germany to return to »normal«. As contradictions in the power block are getting tight, on May 12th, the government implemented a kind of more flexible crisis management, easing social and economic life—but the federal states are to decide how far this should go. The result is a competition between the states about who is easing more and quicker than the others, with very inconsistent measures. By doing so, they are sending out the message that the pandemic is overcome, at least this is how many perceive it. We think this is a dangerous experiment in real life. Easing comes four weeks too soon, as much as we can know right now. Prerequisites mentioned above are not being met. There is still not enough staff in the local health administrations, so that an effective control of measures would be possible. Workplace safety is

not given, resulting in new virus hotspots in slaughterhouses, logistics, call-centers and commerce or in considerably more infections among farm labourers, needless to say: in the low-wage sectors of the economy. Schools and day-care facilities don't have the conditions to take care and teach children in smaller groups, meaning enough staff and hygienic standards. In geriatric care there is not even enough protective equipment, as it is true for hospitals. The production of protective equipment has not yet increased substantially in numbers, but the production of useless cars no one wants to buy is already on track again. And there is still not enough capacity for testing. In short: this is a dangerous bet on a second wave of infections.

Regardless of the path ultimately taken, for the future democratic institutions should be allowed to return to normal even before the crisis has been overcome. Basic democratic, political, and social rights should be strengthened. Government, legislative, and administrative agencies, as well as public offices and schools must be prepared for major crises in the future, such as those associated with climate change, water shortages, or shortages of food or medical aid. Not only transport routes, telecommunications, and electricity prove to be critical infrastructures, but also agriculture (especially the smaller farmers) and food processing, civil protection, schools and universities, as well as scientific research institutions. Research funds

must be used to implement long-term resilience.

As in the past, we can expect that new types of crises will result in large parts of the economy being shut down. For this reason, it is important that the workforce be given the right to a say. In order to facilitate this, companies should set up crisis committees that adequately represent their workforce.

The current crisis shows that pre-existing hardships are resulting in even greater difficulties for a number of people: Rent, communication, shopping, transportation. Social infrastructures must be transferred to the public sector (with different representatives and owners: state, municipalities, parliaments, cooperatives, public holding companies) and expanded. Material, medical, and communicative care must be secured as a precautionary measure. The socio-spatial aspects that correspond with this must be planned democratically in the medium and long-term.

In the months following the crisis, research projects and advisory committees should be set up to discuss proposals for safeguarding democracy in the future amidst far-reaching natural and social crises. This would also require transformation councils at different levels and in different sectors in order to combine the indispensable socio-ecological, but also the informational digital transformation with a democratization of democracy.

Faced with this crisis, it is only logical that Portugal has legalized all migrants living there and provided them with health insurance. Other European countries must implement this standard as well.

More than 40,000 people have to hold out in refugee camps on the Greek islands, more than 10,000 of whom are minors, and some of whom have been waiting here for several years under living conditions that are partly inhumane, and without adequate health care. Similarly tense situations are found in refugee camps on the Greek-Turkish and Croatian-Bosnian EU external borders.

140 cities in Germany have declared themselves »safe havens«. Cities and rural districts have expressed their willingness to accept refugees—from EU states, from sea rescue, or from the external borders—beyond the quota system. The German Ministry of the Interior says »no« and we say »yes«: federal states are permitted to accept refugees from other EU member states. This was the conclusion reached of a juristic survey commissioned by RLS on the »The Acceptance of Refugees by the Federal States« (Heuser 2020).

In this context, the association MISSION LIFELINE is planning an airlift between Lesbos and Berlin or Thuringia as part of its plans to evacuate refugees from Greece. The money for the first flight has already been collected. State governments are willing, the legality has been proven, the civil society initiative is ready for

## 5 // Migration—Leave No One Behind

implementation. An exciting experiment in rebellious government and action.

### **DISCURSIVE POSSIBILITIES DESPITE LITTLE LEeway**

#### **1 // Fiscal policy and debt ceiling in Europe: exclusive vs. mutual solidarity**

Italy, Spain, Germany,—one EU country after another is suspending the debt ceiling, and the EU Commission is forced to do the same. Each country is looking for ways out of the crisis on its own, knowing that this is not feasible for countries like Italy and Spain. 13 countries in the eurozone see Eurobonds as a way of preventing state insolvencies within the EU. Even the Institut der Deutschen Wirtschaft (Institute of the German Economy) has spoken in favour of them for the sake of »German interest«. However, the German government is opposed to this option, even though the union has been shaken by conflicts that threaten its very existence (on democracy, on foreign policy as well as trade, on economic, and budgetary policy, etc.) for a long time—a breaking test for the EU. Many people have already accepted the possibility of the EU breaking up and its transformation into a free trade zone. The EU must begin anew as a community of solidarity, as the European left has been calling for a long time. The chances for this happening are currently limited.

It is significant that enormous amounts of financial resources are once

again being made available without hesitation in Germany while at the same time a European solution is being blocked. Italy needs direct financial aid immediately. Even the neo-liberal economist Hans-Werner Sinn is calling for 20 billion euros of emergency aid to Italy without repayment. After all, the European Union is, among other things, mainly responsible for the dilapidated state of the health systems in Greece and Spain. But it's not about European solidarity. It never was: the played-out image of »European solidarity« shows its hypocrisy. In fact, it was never about solidarity, but rather about successfully regulating the competition between European countries. But even that is something the EU is increasingly less capable of. After the euro crisis, then the so called migration crisis, and now COVID-19, Italy (like Greece) feels left alone for the third time in ten years and is accepting aid from China, Russia, Venezuela, and Cuba.

Germany's European policy is characterized by national self-interest and exclusive solidarity: Just like in 2009, crisis Keynesianism is only applied in Germany—the rest are left to live in austerity. They hope that there will be a sharp dent in the growth trend, especially in exports, but that then things will continue on again cheerfully, at the expense of the others. Already questionable ten years ago, this model was largely responsible for the euro crisis. The euro is not immune to a new crisis. For example, if actors

on the international financial markets begin to doubt Italy's creditworthiness after the COVID-19 crisis causes the country to run into problems with its government bonds, then this would be the beginning of a new euro crisis.

In addition to the liquidity guarantee from the ECB and a temporary lifting of debt restrictions, the introduction of Eurobonds would finally be necessary to enable economically weaker countries to finance themselves at more favourable interest rates. However, the German government in alliance with the Netherlands is still blocking the introduction of Eurobonds. We assume, however, that these measures will be implemented eventually (under whatever name) as a result of the severity of the crisis. Of course, the debt restrictions and the fiscal pact would have to be permanently suspended (for refinancing see below)<sup>11</sup>.

Similar measures would be required at an international level to avoid a debt crisis of global proportions and to enable the rapid repair of global health structures (see below). A debt moratorium, or better still, debt relief, could be introduced immediately, the IMF could provide drawing rights (in effect loans) with long loan periods and low interest rates without the usual conditionality, and a global health and emergency fund could provide direct aid. No one knows in what other ways the intersectional crisis in the Global South will be exacerbated by COVID-19. Unilaterally imposed controls

on the flows of capital controls are a tried and tested means, not only of preventing capital flight during the crisis. In times of need such as these, stock exchanges and substantial parts of the financial market should be closed anyway, since now more than ever it is clear that they serve mostly a function of control rather than of financing social needs.

## 2 // Healthcare for all: global & free

Healthcare is a human right that many people are currently deprived of since the international community could not bring itself to provide the necessary funding. And yet the current situation threatens to challenge our imagination once again. In the strict sense of the term we are partly experiencing catastrophic developments, in which there is hardly any medical care available, especially for the subaltern classes and groups in the »Global South«, infected people are dying on the streets, a huge informal sector is collapsing, leaving billions of people without any income, and new famines are almost inevitable—a world crisis. Particularly in densely packed refugee camps and the poor quarters of megacities in Latin America, Africa, and Asia, the social distancing necessary to reduce infection rates is not feasible. Millions of migrant workers, agricultural workers, and informal traders do not have the option of working from a »home office«. Even before COVID-19, access to a functioning health care system for billions of people was an unattainable privilege



State Public Health Laboratory in Exton tests for COVID-19, photo: flickr/Governor Tom Wolf ©

reserved for a small elite. The collapse of global circuits of value and world trade means hundreds of millions of workers in world market factories in the Global South will be deprived of their livelihoods. And the crisis has very different effects according to class, gender, ethnicity, and legal status (see e.g. Davis 2020), which deepens structural social inequalities.

The neoliberal structural reforms that have been ongoing since the 1970s have not only destroyed or severely weakened the public health systems of nation-states worldwide, but also the instruments of global health care policy. Privatization of health care systems and the commodification of health care systems have strengthened the power

of transnational health care corporations and insurance companies, the pharmaceutical industry and medical equipment manufacturers with their respective profit interests worldwide. The World Bank and the World Trade Organization (WTO) have been established as central players in the neoliberal restructuring of global healthcare since the 1980s. The World Health Organization (WHO) is a UN sub-organization that is bound to the United Nations Social Pact, which defines access to health care as a social human right. When this was institutionally dismantled, private foundations such as the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation were able to establish themselves as powerful players. This dramatically weakened multilateral forums for global health regulation and the governance of health policy in the public

interest—from patent rights to health infrastructure.

The current crisis could open a window for redefining discourses at the international level as well. The demand for free health care organized in the public interest must be made globally, beyond the national framework. We have already provided information above on what financial measures are immediately necessary. According to the UN, the African continent alone needs 100,000 billion USD worth of aid just to overcome the current crisis.

We should use the current social interest in viral diseases and the possibilities of combating them to expand our perspective a little: In 2018 alone, 405,000 people worldwide died of malaria, 380,000 of them in Africa. Even though there is a vaccine for tuberculosis, it still killed around 1.6 million people in 2017. This amounts to almost 5,000 tuberculosis deaths per day. Even if the Global North has remained mostly disinterested in these issues until now, this could change out of simple self-interest.

By becoming a global economic factor, the coronavirus, the so-called »Ebola for the rich«, could open up the political space for new alliances to adequately finance global health care: »Pandemics teach us that all human beings are born equal and therefore moral in the same way. In line with this, the danger of a global pandemic can only be averted if the concept of ›health for all‹ is finally realized and the simple truth is recognized

everywhere in the world that every public health system is only as strong as its poorest patient«. (Sivaraman 2006) The demand for a global human right to health care can be combined with the demand for other global social rights such as the right to housing, education, and labour rights.

The COVID-19 crisis can also create space for a new discussion around global solidarity which conceives of socio-ecological transformation, global social rights, and the fight against authoritarianism as part of the same struggle. One starting point would be to expand the strategic discussions around a transformative Green New Deal to include the global dimensions of social inequality and an alternative world economic order (Kanzleiter 2020). The crisis also occasions the need for a strategic debate on a progressive relationship between selective »deglobalization« and another kind of globalization based on solidarity. Certain political capabilities such as the organization of public services would actually have to be taken back from the international or European level. Production chains are stretched thin. If medical products and equipment are not available in certain countries because everything has been relocated to China and elsewhere, a problem arises. Production structures must be in place for indispensable necessities, or »essential« items, as they are now called.

But counter-globalization would also be conceivable. Instead of the WHO having to go begging at every crisis,

independent structures for producing the most important drugs and vaccines—e.g. against known diseases like measles, Ebola, tuberculosis, malaria, etc.—could be established under the umbrella of the WHO. These structures would be oriented around public welfare. Patent law would of course have to be amended. This would also be possible without a major reform to the UNO, which is unlikely. Even the RLS could also—for a limited time on grounds of the crisis—spend an appropriate part of its development cooperation funds directly for the purchase of respirators and other medical equipment (this money is otherwise reserved for development cooperation institutions in the narrower sense such as GIZ or aid organizations such as medico international).

Healthcare as a global social infrastructure is only one element of a series of global social rights that are far from being realized (for a comprehensive analysis of the struggles for global healthcare see Sengupta et al. 2020). Even if the current balance of power makes such proposals seem unrealistic, they must be demanded in order to show possible alternatives. In the countries of the Global South, too, we are experiencing a new wave of practices of solidarity (for numerous reports from the various countries and regions see the RLS dossier »Solidarisch gegen Corona«, [www.rosalux.de/corona](http://www.rosalux.de/corona)). It is important to strengthen these local movements which act with global solidarity in mind. In the field of healthcare policy this

includes networks such as the People's Health Movement (PHM), which has local organizations in 70 countries.<sup>12</sup> But in fact we need a coordinated and more cohesive approach—it's time for a new international of progressive forces.

### 3 // Human security and civil crisis and conflict prevention

Finally, peace or at least a ceasefire are fundamental prerequisites for access to health. The petition for a global ceasefire by UN Secretary-General António Guterres should be supported and pursued.

For the time being, the Federal Republic of Germany should refrain from acting in those cases where it has influence: no participation in war and police operations; no unjust trade agreements that destroy local economies in the countries of origin; no development cooperation that is only tied to the implementation of neo-liberal reforms; no exploitation of raw materials at the expense of the destruction of nature and human habitats, and over-exploitation; but also a halt on domestic coal production, discontinuing a one-sided export orientation—to name only a few examples that structurally promote crises and conflicts. The impact that economic, social, and physical violence have as causes for wars should be emphasized immediately. In war-torn regions, the pandemic has caused systems of medical care to practically collapse, and many international aid organizations are withdrawing their workforce.

A campaign for a substantial reduction of arms exports, in particular a ban on exports to states involved in violent conflicts and wars, might be easier. Revisiting the debate on converting the arms industry seems timely, given the choice between the dissipation of sufficient resources for social reproduction in the form of demand-oriented health care on the one hand, and the billions spent on a useless potential for destruction for the mere sake of generating export revenues on the other. At the same time, the effect on overall employment would be rather small since the defence industry only employs 100,000 people, or a maximum of 300,000 employees including those employed in delivery. In the context of a global arms race, it ties up billions in investments that are needed in the fight against the impending climate catastrophe and the crisis in general, and at the same time, it contributes, so to speak, to the export of crises and wars that have a reinforcing effect in the intersectional crisis.

It is downright grotesque to classify the production of weapons as »essential goods«, and bishops in the regions of Piedmont and Valle d'Aosta are protesting against the ongoing production of weapons despite COVID-19: »A government decree stipulates that for reasons of disease control, only »essential« goods may currently be produced; a corresponding special permit is also available for the arms industry. [...] »We say no to the production of weapons, especially at this time when

tools and equipment are needed for life and not for death«, a recent letter from the bishops said. [...] »How many hospital beds could be purchased with the cost of a single fighter plane?« ask the clergy.« (Vaticannews.va) They are particularly critical of a prestigious fighter jet project in Piedmont, which is the only production facility for F-35 fighter aircrafts outside the USA.

Internationally, civil conflict prevention must be developed and demands must be made for a massive reallocation of funds for crisis operations to development cooperation. It would be conceivable that the Federal Republic of Germany or a »coalition of the willing« would take the lead and initiate the mass training of »civil peace forces« (van Aken), who come from the respective conflict regions themselves. There is no need to wait for a government initiative. Civil society and development cooperation organizations could jointly break new ground here. This would especially be a task for the Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung.

Whether the corona crisis can be used for a peace initiative is still an open question. It is the opposite that is to be feared: an intensification of the intersectional crisis leading to new conflicts and wars.

### **FOR A NEW SOLIDARITY**

It is not easy to operate in this new combination of highly dynamic crises, even less so when the crisis strengthens the state's executive branch and forces the left onto



photo: flickr/Fotomovimiento ©

the defensive. Nevertheless, the situation is open. Even if the executive branch is strengthened, it is still being driven by unprecedented events and without a plan. They can try to use the crisis to their advantage, but they are not immune to imponderables and failures.

Already windows of opportunity are opening up: The left has an immediate chance at intervening by translating the currently changing public discourses into a real shift in the relations of power and achieving concrete improvements above all in five fields: *a*) above all by advocating for improvements in the health sector, and recognizing systemically important (women's) professions and social infrastructures, and making sure they are

adequately equipped; *b*) in an improved »protective shield for the people« and the questioning of debt ceiling; *c*) for a social-ecological investment offensive; *d*) for a democratic offensive that not only revokes the authoritarian crisis measures but allows real democratic progress which includes its social foundations; and *e*) in the direct assistance of refugees through concrete actions by rebellious state governments and civil society initiatives.

In these fields, forces should be concentrated and campaigns should be (further) developed that make few demands, while at the same time generating a productive conflict for the left and transporting a broader perspective.

There are more partial openings in the social discourse which may not be sufficient for the immediate improvement

of the political and social situation, but which nevertheless make leftist debates and positions in certain fields more visible:

*a)* on the future of Europe and the question of European solidarity; *b)* in the debate on concrete international measures for health for all as a global social right; and *c)* in steps towards human security and civil crisis and conflict prevention.

In view of the imminent dangers posed by the counterforces and the defensiveness of the left in the crisis, there is at the same time no need to harbour false hopes for a left offensive. Let us call for green socialism, but let us advance concrete projects in this direction, in places where something could be pushed forward given the conditions of COVID-19 and economic crises, both happening in the tenth year of a deep organic crisis or an intersectional crisis. We need a little voluntarism against the depression caused by the crisis, but critical realism for the long term.

The corona crisis reminds us how fragile life is, every life, and what is really »essential«. Perhaps not the most favourable political circumstance for the left, but a window of opportunity for a new solidarity.

*Translated by Hunter Bolin & Shane Anderson for Gegensatz Translation Collective.*

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1 Fake news continues to blossom, and yet it is almost as if there has been a return to science and education in public discourse. It is nevertheless important to remain careful and not mount a new expertocracy. It is also important to remind virologists

and epidemiologists of their limits whenever they place their area of expertise too close to political decisions. It is important to leave room for doubt and criticism.

2 <https://de.statista.com/statistik/daten/studie/37123/umfrage/weltweites-tourismusaufkommen-nach-reiseankuenften-seit-1950/>

3 [www.destatis.de/DE/Presse/Pressemitteilungen/2020/01/PD20\\_018\\_811.html](http://www.destatis.de/DE/Presse/Pressemitteilungen/2020/01/PD20_018_811.html)

4 Other interpretations see a clear direction of capitalist development, for instance in the expansion of »emerging markets« and particularly in China. Sablowski dares to hypothesize that the accumulation/further reproduction of capital has already partially overshadowed Fordist development in recent decades. The question regarding hegemony was already controversial during the 2008/09 crisis. See the debate Bader et al., 2011: »Vielfachkrise« (Intersectional Crisis). A debate: <https://www.zeitschrift-luxemburg.de/ruckkehr-der-kampfe-heft-22011-ist-in-druck/>

5 Die Linke is demanding a flat fee of 500 euros for all full-time employees in nursing care, pro rata for part-time workers. The aim is also a minimum wage of 14,50 euro in geriatric care. In light of the high numbers of part-time workers in this field, it is also important that no one in geriatric care earns less than 3,000-euro gross.

6 On the distribution of wealth this was recently portrayed by Stefan Kaufman, Virus und Reichtum, in ND v. 4. April, p. 3.

7 Keeping a modified version of the solidarity tax contribution should also be considered instead abandoning this instrument as planned by the federal government.

8 Pre-existing respiratory tract diseases due to fine dust pollution are one of the causes for the severity of COVID-19.

9 In the opposite direction, various associations from the auto industry have sent a letter to the European Commission requesting request for support during the COVID-19 crisis. In this letter they ask for support not only through financial contributions, but also by suspending regulations on safety, climate, and environmental protection as a prerequisite for

recovering the »losses« in production and sales after the pandemic because of European competitiveness, jobs, and so on (see Krull et al., 2020).

10 Tesla's new E-SUV, which weighs over 1.5 tons, illustrates the absurdity of the auto industry. But here is another example: »In 2022 Continental wants to launch serial production of an advanced 3-D display technology. The automotive supplier is relying on the so-called Leia system, which uses light guide modules with nanostructures that bend the light and direct it to where it is needed for 3-D effects. Objects in the graphics are composed of eight perspectives and are therefore visible from different angles and thus also for passengers and rear passengers«. Converting production to include useless gadgets without ecological sensibility is a recipe for a joy ride instead of social-ecological transformation. (See Krull et al. 2020)

11 Moreover, the protective shield for corporations should be subject to conditions. These include—and this is a lesson learned from the bank bailouts during the global financial crisis—a prohibition on share buybacks and the centralization of capital during the crisis (2008ff encouraged a huge centralization of bank capital), on the transfer of assets to the public sector, and socio-ecological influence on investment and personnel decisions.

12 Compare <https://phmovement.org/>

13 Programmatically, many other things are correct and important, but it is questionable whether the given situation creates favourable conditions for this. Nevertheless, we should demand that conditions be created.

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