Socialism for Future
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Do you want socialism and the future? How can we still talk about socialism in these dystopian times? And how to fall silent upon this? Capitalism is devouring our future—while the crises of our time are literally heating up, it appears that their resolution is all the more absent. Furious ecological destruction, escalating military conflicts, the rise of the radical right as well as the private appropriation of the social wealth are putting the future into question. Planetary boundaries and tipping points are already reached, narrowing the temporal horizon for leftwing alternatives. More and more people are realizing that we are running headlong into catastrophe if we do not radically transform the economy and society quickly—Fridays for Future and the global climate strikes symbolize this. Right now, it’s easier to imagine the end to the world than an end to capitalism (Frederic Jameson).

Thoroughgoing and radical alternatives (system change) are increasingly being called for—and more often. Young people are beginning to connect the future to a socialist vision, especially in the US and in Great Britain. Socialism is even being fought over again in Germany, where the is a strong anti-communist tradition. What does a SOCIALISM FOR FUTURE, a socio-ecological revolution, a green socialism look like? How does it connect the various desires of the many? What does a policy that creates hope and brings real change look like? What is to be done and where do we begin? Socialism should first of all be obvious, self-evident, a matter of course... but it is also about producing exemplary, concrete social conflicts while lampooning the propertied classes’ whine when little is taken from them. And moreover, there are a good many ideas and proposals: The Green New Deal put forward by Alexandra Ocasio-Cortez and Bernie Sanders being the most prominent. The neoliberal mantra »There is no Alternative« was turned into its opposite: There is no longer an alternative to radical transformation. Or, according to Verónica Gago: socialism means taking care of the future.
IT’S TIME
FOR SOMETHING NEW
THEREFORE SOCIALISM

MARIO CANDEIAS

The German left party, DIE LINKE, sees itself as a party fighting for democratic socialism. For about the past eight years, we have been struggling to become more visible, socially effective and relevant, while pursuing a strategy of connective class politics and transformative organizing. That means becoming a party able to consciously and intentionally producing exemplary, concrete social conflicts around key social questions, building clear perspectives for new socialist practices and projects—also attempting to form a social bloc for a transformative left government in Germany.

Actually existing socialism has failed: for good reason. Actually existing capitalism has also failed. Capitalism will not surrender as quickly as state socialism did. Socialism or barbarism—this was Rosa Luxemburg’s watchword just as the world sank deeper into imperialism, colonialism, and the First World War, and later into the Second World War and the Holocaust. Now, as humanity faces an ever-growing mass of problems, barbarism has once again become a real and threatening possibility.

Global inequality has reached previously unknown extremes, both between most countries and within them, with dramatic consequences for social cohesion, democracy and beyond: The process of accumulation now relies far more on upward redistribution than on production on an extended scale, blocking further economic development. The consequences of capitalist growth, which have provoked a planetary ecological crisis, come with this package, which produce further social
conflicts and rapidly growing economic damage in turn. These two trends, along with war and destruction, over-exploitation of resources, asymmetrical trade agreements, and unjust global economic relationships, have all contributed to making the issue of global migration a major challenge: there are currently 71 million refugees in the world, a record number. The vast majority are being taken in by countries in the global South. But the societies of the North, too, have turned into immigration societies, whether they like it or not. Isolationism can only be achieved by trampling on human rights and the values the left holds dear to. In short, humanity faces problems spelling out the failure of capitalism, far beyond the organic crisis of the neo-liberal project. The rise of authoritarianism across the world expresses this. In the interregnum, these new forms of authoritarianism are a function of the specific mechanisms of capitalisms’ crisis and the need to win back and secure power. They have potentials that are incalculable in terms of their destructive power.

Socialism should first of all be obvious.

An alternative is necessary: a renewed democratic socialism, a green socialism.\(^1\) A perspective proceeding through a militant process of experimentation, reuniting our different political initiatives across a range of fields, so that things aren’t collapsed into isolated policy-making, demands and actions is needed. In times of social polarization, a radical perspective is crucial in order to achieve this. It is not simply a matter of defending the welfare state or returning to a nation-state model for regulating capitalism. We need to clearly say that we are working towards the end of capitalism, towards a society that Bernie Sanders blithely refers to as socialist. Quite obviously, this project will include things like free health care and education, as well as affordable housing for all; free-of-charge public services, from libraries to public transport; the restructuring of cities, transport, energy, and agriculture along ecological lines; a great deal more time for one another and for simply living; real democracy and real participation in political decision making. Socialism should first of all be obvious, a matter of course.

This is where the still-unsettled (»unabgegolten«, Bloch) legacy of previous future oriented imaginations come in—from the French and Russian Revolutions to 1968 or 1989. As Corbyn says: »For us it might have been the same thing for the last 40 years, but for the younger generation it’s brand new.« Thus the word socialism once more becomes something that can be said. People notice it, look it up on Wikipedia, get informed. There is an already-existing desire for a more radical critique, for system change, for alternatives; not least, the desire for social-ecological alternatives—a wish that sometimes might not be very concrete.
We should not lag behind in using this old-yet-new word, this not-yet-settled word, to name our ideas of a solidarity-based, democratic, feminist, anti-racist, post-growth alternative to the present system, and arguing, together, for what that word should mean in the 21st century. Socialism—a good, just society, based on solidarity; the simple thing that seems so hard to achieve. Not everyone among the broader left and the social movements will sign on to this, but it should be accepted as self-evident that a transformative left stands for socialism. Depending on the context, it can be called »green«, »democratic«, or »feminist« socialism—but in the end it should be a matter of socialism sans phrase (no ifs or buts).

The word is not really the point, but what else would be a positive word for system change—since it is a matter of nothing less. We should be clear in stating that the aforementioned problems of humanity cannot be dealt with by adjusting a few screws here and there: the depth and the speed of change initially will have to be something comparable to Roosevelt’s New Deal. This might seem exaggerated, but historically, such change has been accomplished in the context of harsh conflicts—and today, the challenges are at least as daunting as during the epoch of crisis and the war economy. The latter underlines, once more, the indispensably leading role that the state will have to play. The fast-approaching recession makes it even clearer: massive investments are going to become necessary (even the Federation of German Industries is talking about giving up on the so-called »black zero« or debt break). Not for the maintenance of the old, but rather for use in building the new! In a certain sense, this will be an entry-project that operates on a progressively increasing scale, because it is a matter of nothing less than developing a new social model. The current crisis and its concomitant polarization can provide momentum to shift the balance of power in this direction, in the face of rapid movements and changes of terrain. We should seize the moment.

**WHY SOCIALISM? THE METHOD**

The concept of socialism attempts to bring diverse interests and movements together into the spirit of a »revolutionary Realpolitik«, such that it not »only sets itself achievable goals that it pursues to obtain by the most effective means in the shortest time«, but rather goes »in all the parts of its endeavors beyond the bounds of the existing order in which it operates«.²

...aiming towards concrete social conflicts as revelators.

**What should be aimed for in politics?** Where is the appropriate point to realize a concrete break with capitalism, and/or which is the political field where quantitative changes could be driven so far that they constitute a real qualitative change?
In the first place, it is a matter of consciously and intentionally producing exemplary, concrete social conflicts: for example, the care workers’ struggle at the Charité hospital of Berlin around the question of the necessary numbers of staff for a good health care, or the recent initiative to expropriate Deutsche Wohnen and similar large real estate companies in Berlin. A given conflict should be centered on everyday needs, aim at immediate improvement for individuals, and create a dynamic for further action and perspectives. This includes disruptive practices such as strikes, occupations, and blockades, but also popular referenda. Self-empowerment and perseverance are central to extending the scope of the possible—only a short time ago, one would have thought that a campaign to expropriate large real estate corporations would have no chance of success—but in fact it did. A conflict of this kind lends visibility, inspires, motivates. An appropriate campaign offers possibilities to concretely connect previously fragmented initiatives and organizations. If successful, it can shift the overall discourse within society, and thereby the relations of power, and thus extend the realm of what is possible and increase the assertiveness of other demands as well (for instance, the expropriation campaign immediately improved the discursive field for the demand for a rent cap, as well as inspiring radical reflections in other fields). And it’s obvious that conflicts can also be a tremendous source of joy, even at the smallest level, with local forms of organization. Once a local campaign bears fruit and makes links with other campaigns, people begin to feel like they are part of something broader. The work of organizing—connecting, broadening, anchoring—is central to making the movement grow. What, then, are the three to four key social questions that have to be solved, and that are also suitable for developing conflicts productive for the left?

The adversary must be specifically identified in every case. One should be as exact as possible here tactically and strategically, so that the opponent becomes concretized—this can be achieved, for example, by researching the backgrounds of investors, the machinations of a corporation; who is pocketing the profits from this or that hospital group at the expense of patients and personnel; who is supplying arms to crisis zones; or who is putting up barriers to an ecological transition in mobility with anti-pollution fraud and corruption, etc.. Here, the naming and blaming of opponents is important. Thus, a connective, socialist class politics can articulate the ways in which struggles over working conditions, wages, and time, but also over reproduction (health, housing, ecology) are still class struggles—that is not evident, neither in the industrial sector (with the tradition of social partnership, incorporated to national corporatism, including new projects like the digital pact), nor in the service sectors, and least of all in the area of public social
infrastructure or indeed in relation to the climate question. For example, the myth that we are all in the same boat when it comes to the ecological crisis, and that even the rich cannot escape, is an utterly vacuous concoction in view of the extremely unequal class-distribution of the causes and consequences of climate change, both globally and intra-societally.

In addition to naming the enemy, systematic change also requires connective (often quite general) slogans, along with positive and specific projects—a mixture between achievable goals and driving progressive demands and initiatives.

... pitilessly lampoon the propertied classes’ whine when a little bit is taken away from them.

Old socialist problems such property and power, redistribution, planning, and democracy are being updated and linked with new problems—with the prospect of expanding the common ownership over the immediate conditions of life, as well as the social means of production and reproduction.

**WHAT MAKES THIS SOCIALIST?**

It is less a matter of describing a ready-made recipe than of formulating some orienting elements for the real movement that abolishes the present state of things.

1 // **Redistribution**: Redistribution on its own is not enough. And yet, a radical redistribution of wealth and capital is an essential precondition for every left-wing politics—and it is against this question that we can measure who is in earnest about a change of direction, and actually wants to return the social surplus to the majority of the people. This is class struggle in the narrow sense, and might begin with the restriction of profit-oriented interests (for instance, fixing a maximum return on the sale of land) and end with large-scale tax reform. We should not enter into pseudo-economic debates (about whether this will cause reductions in investment, etc.); instead, we should ruthlessly mock the whinging of the propertied classes when a little bit is taken away from them. We ought to be highlighting the moments where it actually becomes possible (and in fact was already possible) to take something away from the owners; in this way, we counteract the feeling that taxing the rich and redistribution of wealth is impossible to achieve.

2 // **Infrastructure Socialism**: Winning back and building up the public realm, the commons, and the so-called »goods of freedom« (Brie/Klein) is crucial: Through the development of collective consumption through the strengthening of social and other infrastructures, as well as general solidarity-based systems of security, the groundwork will be laid for a) a solidary and democratic way of life, and b) removing the fear and insecurity in the face of necessary and sweeping social changes, as well as working against the
fixation, among unions as well as parts of the working class, on better wages and consumption in material terms—while also not getting bogged down in debates over renunciation. With such an expansion (non-commodity form) of the public sphere, markets and privatization will be pushed back at the same time. The public as the sphere of the common has to become tangible, and the wealth of the public sphere be highlighted.

Here, there are many starting points for social struggles to aim for; alongside housing (cf. LuXemburg 2/2019), there is for example the health sector: goals could include the abolition of flat-rate payments based on diagnosis (the DRGs), as well as new statutory and contractual rules for staff allocation, the abolition of two-class medicine and private health insurance, the re-communalization or public ownership of the large hospital and care groups, and the establishment of polyclinics and local health centres with councils for care and health.

An urgent area of action would be in taking meaningful steps towards a socio-ecologic transformation of mobility and a car-free and green city, already indispensable for ecological reasons, but also for the re-appropriation of public space. The elements that this has to include are well-known: shifting individual traffic to a massively expanded and smart public transport system (especially for urban-rural commuters), alongside significant price reductions that ultimately lead to free public transport; return of businesses and infrastructures to public hands; better working conditions and wages; priority for pedestrians and cyclists; and the phasing-out of the internal combustion engine until the year 2030. This would mean confronting powerful corporate interests and lobbies. Now is the time.

All in all, this expansion of the public sphere will have to be combined with a strengthening of the rights and finances of municipalities and communes, which in the most crucial areas ought to be responsible for the immediate needs of life: from health, mobility, education, and energy, to safety and employment, through to the production and preparation of food (schools, child and elderly care, hospitals, public cantinas etc.). The vision of a city for all, or the new commune in the emphatic sense, would offer those goods of freedom that are fundamental to an individual and collective development—free of fear.

The public as the sphere of the commons has to become tangible, and the wealth of the public sphere be highlighted.

3 // Real Democracy: meaning economic democracy (see 4), as well as a democratization of the state, the family, and ways of life. Here it would, in a certain sense, be a question of winning back the principle of
subsidiarity: decisions about local needs would be made by relevant councils. Where decisions at the »lowest« level affect other levels or regions, the affected regions are to be included in the decision-making process, or the decision is shifted to a higher level of responsibility. The long-standing crises of representation and legitimation have a great deal to do with the fact that essential needs of the governed population are not being taken into account, and that people themselves are not able to play a part. Both beyond and within national states, a transnational bourgeoisie has established itself, which only accepts »a democracy in conformity with the market« (Angela Merkel). An independent class of the rich and super-rich, the »plutocratic extremists« (Piketty), is able to evade financing the common good, while the »political class« becomes ever more disconnected. To many, the state appears less as the site of political struggle and debate than as an alienated (class) power.

The development of the public realm in the direction of a care economy must therefore simultaneously consist in the radical democratization of the state. Neither the »well-meaning«, paternalistic, and patriarchal Fordist welfare state, nor authoritarian state socialism were especially emancipatory—let alone the neo-liberal conversion from public services to competition and pure economic efficiency. A left state project must therefore realize the extension of participation and transparency that has been demanded by the movements for real democracy since 2011—in a socialist perspective of absorbing the state into civil society, as Gramsci puts it. Participation does not simply mean being allowed to express one’s opinion or voting from time to time, but rather being able to influence real decisions. Structures are required which cannot simply be rolled back when the government turns right, as it happened with the paternalistic, and ultimately disempowering, social-democratic welfare state. Only once the subalterns appropriate the state, and fill it with life, will they defend it when others try to claw it back, sell it off, or block and monopolize decision-making.

But if it becomes possible to re-communalize or socialize essential spheres, expand public and cooperative enterprises, and establish self-government, how do we ensure that these will function in the desired democratic fashion and make participation possible?

Finding functional democratic routines is important. And yet it will always be a matter of repeatedly breaking open democratic institutions, of their »opening for the masses« (Poulantzas) through participatory processes that must continuously be renewed, and the questioning of institutions when bureaucratization looms—with the perspective of ever further absorbing institutions into civil society through the implementation of self-management and councils at various levels. This is
especially relevant to left state projects. The obstinacy from below may not always correspond to the logic of (left) state projects, but prevents apparatuses from becoming alienated. In this regard, municipalist approaches (from Berlin to Barcelona and elsewhere) should be driven further, neighbourhood councils and participatory budgeting should be linked up and developed.

4 // Economic Democracy: This is not only a question of the public or of state ownership, but also of democratizing the economy: the »achievements« of high-rank management and shareholder value concepts in corporate governance are extremely doubtful in the face of short-term thinking, financial crisis, exorbitant managerial salaries, exorbitant tax avoidance, bankruptcies and mass firings as well as increasing ecological destruction and (emissions) scandals. Even the classic corporate co-determination was insufficient to meet with the pressure of transnational competition and finance-dominated control, and itself at times fell into entanglements of collaboration and corruption. Hence it is time for a democratization of the economy that goes beyond the classic forms of co-determination, for a far-reaching participation by employees, unions, associations and initiatives, population/consumers, and other stakeholders in business decisions (and this means all along the entire transnational production line). Employees should obtain decision-making and veto rights regarding staff allocation and relocation of operations, and stronger influence in terms of working hours and the organization of production. Regional councils and employees should have rights to participate in decisions about the direction of innovation and investment. In general, key industries should be turned into public or collective property (remember the Meindner-plan) or workers cooperatives. State subsidies should also be used as levers to push through employment rights, participation, and alternative forms of ownership. The activities of businesses have profound importance, effects, and consequences for the relevant communities, regions, and beyond—accordingly, their activities are in no wise a private matter.

5 // Irreversible? The property question: Socialization has become a highly debated topic again. This opening should be used purposefully: as we saw with the housing question, even if the actual goal has not yet been reached, the campaign to expropriate large real estate companies in Berlin shifted the discourse and opened up additional possibilities. This experience can be concretely translated, in order to overcome obstacles to the development of health infrastructures (hospitals and care companies), to securing private data and digital infrastructures (Facebook et al), to the mobility transition (automotive companies and Deutsche Bahn) or to the construction of social housing (informal cartels in the construction economy). The socialization of central material and social infrastructures, as well as essential produc-
tion structures under the form of public companies or cooperatives (both to be governed by councils, which would consist of employees, users, and affected groups, as well as political representatives) will be an essential factor in durably shifting the relations of power. A real socialization (not merely formal ownership by the state) would also be an effective protection against later attempts at re-privatization.

But the issue of irreversibility is also relevant to other essential decisions and achievements that a future society will not be able to ignore—here we are talking about introducing eternity clauses into the German Basic Law: in essence, constitutionally safeguarding public social infrastructure and banning privatization. From the right, constitutional law is continually being stuffed with neo-liberal and authoritarian measures, while institutions and structures of the same sort are set up, all with the aim of removing specific policy areas from democratic influence—beginning with the independence of the European Central Bank and the one-sided definition of its role, and extending through to the Fiscal Compact and the Treaty of Lisbon and so on. Now, we should not aim to do the same thing as the ruling classes. But the extension of social and political rights, specific goods of freedom, etc., should not be put into question so easily, and should hence be institutionalized, when possible at a constitutional level, preferably at a transnational and international level too.

If the markets are not fulfilling their investment function, then this has to be transformed into a public, participatively organized task.

6 // Socialization of investment (Keynes): The over-accumulation of capital produces waves of speculative bubbles, followed by capital and job destruction, while ever larger areas of social reproduction—education and training, the environment, the fight against starvation, infrastructure, and public services—are left behind or gutted by austerity measures. The major problems of humanity remain unresolved, at the expense of the subaltern classes and the natural environment. If the markets are not fulfilling their investment function, then this has to be transformed into a public, participatively organized task. Mariana Mazzucato shows how, over the last 40 years, the creation of new technologies and productive forces, and even of new markets, has not been driven by business, but by public research programs and measures: from the Internet, through to renewable technologies, Nano-technologies or biotechnologies. »It is the State that is in fact willing to take the risk that businesses won’t, and which has proved transformative, creating entire new markets and sectors« (Mazzucato 2013).
What do we want to invest in? Wouldn’t this be quite a good campaign question? The problem also encompasses the socialization of innovation, in order to orient the development of productive forces towards the needs of people rather than the generation of profit. We have to go on the offensive and highlight the ineffectiveness of the private sector: the latter is able to develop all manner of complicated absurdities, from digital gadgets to armaments, but fails to solve even the simplest problems, such as creating new materials for cheap and ecological housing. The production of ecological (lightweight) materials and substances, the securing of 100-percent renewable energy with corresponding decentralized storage capacities and shrinking electricity consumption, the development of smart public mobility systems with simultaneous reduction of traffic, the replacement of rare earths by alternative raw materials, ecological agricultural methods to secure food sovereignty in the face of global warming—these are just a few examples of areas of progressive innovation that require public investment in large-scale foundational and applied research.

7 // Collective creativity: Unimagined potential for productivity could be released by liberating the autonomy of the »immediate producers« (Marx). The new productive forces enable the »emancipation of workers from the ties, to fulfill only a partial function, thereby only developing restricted and limited skills and capacities«. But »private production will not carry on to the peaceful mural by Shepard Fairey in Austin, Texas, photo: Bruce Turner Ⓒ
unfolding of that possibility«; »the ruling forces will not destroy a disposition voluntary, in which they represent the »head«, regulating the work of the 'hands' (PAQ 1987, 58). Only in »its democratic form, as cooperative individuality«, could a new division of labour develop its potentials (Müller 2010, 312).

Against the background of increasing transnationalization and standardization new forms of work organization have been withdrawn or have reached their limits. A kind of corporate cultural break was initiated, starting with the so-called »new economy crisis« in 2000. Capital removed spaces for work autonomy, tightened control, pushed for ever more work intensification, precarisation and over-exploitation. The result was a decline in the productivity of these sectors. »The potential of the new productive forces could not be realized further under neoliberal relations of production.« (Candeias 2010, 8)

Knowledge management systems try to collect and generalize the specialized knowledge of high-skilled workers. Industry4.0 is intended to transfer the knowledge of the immediate producers to machine systems on a new, higher scale. Of course self-organization of machine systems is limited to a »space of different possibilities of problem solving, designed in advance by humans by means of mathematic modeling« (Ohm/Bürger 2015, 22). Even with the use of so-called artificial intelligence it is »normal and expectable that humans make mistakes - software engineers and programmers as well as system operators«. That’s why the construction of »intelligent«, meaning alleged error-free systems, hold high risks« (Weyer 1997, 245). This dialectic of automation was already true with the old dream of the completely automated factory at the FIAT company in the 1970ies. The new machine-based learning error detection and correction could help to restrict the regulation of production processes to a few selected human overseers. But with this revolution of productive forces also tremendous capabilities and escalating collective capacity to act are concentrated in the hands of working teams, that have learned to speak a common international language due to 4.0 production systems.

Nevertheless: The development of »cooperative creativity« of complex work in the process of informatization and computerization is the kernel of these new productive forces. It points to »a new scale of societalization« of work (Müller 2010, 285)—but for the time being its realization is blocked due to capitalist relations of production. The base for a free development of cooperative creativity would be the democratization of how work is organized, and of who decides the aim and purpose of production, therefore overcoming the unproductive limits of private property, as it is already enclosed in the tendency of these new productive forces. This would enable the networking
of non-capitalistic (digital and material) production via a flexible integration of machine systems beyond the already existing niches. It’s about freeing cooperative creativity from the restrictive imperatives of competition and profit (vgl. Candeias 2015).

A new concept of wealth: For a genuine socio-ecological transformation, we will have to focus on reproductive needs, on a shift towards a »reproductive economy« that knows how to limit itself and at the same time creates new wealth: different social innovations, more rational productive forces, abundant free time, well-rounded and universal personal development, and space for tenderness, solidarity, support, and positive motivation instead of competition. At the centre of such a transformation would be areas that generally fall under a (broad) concept of reproductive or care work: the development of needs-oriented social infrastructures of public health, care, education and training, research, social services, food, and the protection of our natural environment, the nurturing of human relations. Almost everyone has been complaining about shortfalls in these key areas for years, and these are the only areas in which employment is growing in industrialized countries. They must be kept public, not surrendered to the market. This would simultaneously contribute to the greening of our mode of production (since working with people itself is minimally destructive ecologically), as well as to dealing with the crises of (paid) labour and (unpaid) reproduction. And, when properly applied, such infrastructures can contribute to the reshaping of gender relations in an emancipatory direction. Overcoming the division of labour between the sexes should be combined with overcoming the separation of mental and manual labour—head and hand. Relatedly, the new »feminist international« is currently the most radical and visible international antithesis to both global authoritarianism and to neoliberal austerity. Such a movement should be taken further, as connective feminist class politics (Fried 2017)—it’s already on the way with the discussions around the women’s strike and reproductive justice.

…socially necessary work oriented towards reducing consumption of energy and raw materials, measured on its contribution to human development, and to the wealth of multifaceted human relations, not to the production of surplus value.

A new concept of work: This social-ecological and feminist offensive is also about a new definition and distribution of the understanding of socially necessary work—through reduction of waged labour time, the expansion of collective,
something like an individual »drawing right« for autonomous periods (alone or in groups) for the purpose of idiosyncratic projects and inventions, research, art, etc., that create space for creative and innovative development (including the necessary minimum resources and trial phases, unless it is a question of dangerous procedures), without necessarily requiring collective consent.

Equally, individual drawing rights can also be imagined in the form of sabbaticals not directly tied to socially necessary labour in the narrow sense (such as for travel, leisure, excess, and experimentation).

Drawing rights for child-raising and care times, as they partially exist at present (at least in some countries), will by contrast become largely redundant, insofar as the reproductive work itself will be a central part of socially necessarily everyday work—but when desired, entirely possible. To this extent, the collective definition, configuration, and division of socially necessary work remains in the foreground, but is also combined with the possibility of temporary exit-options for individuals, and collectively guaranteed autonomous spaces.

10 // Less is more (sometimes): Reorientation towards reproductive needs goes hand in hand with a focus on internal markets and production, the development of new (socio-ecological) innovations and new productive forces for material production. Global production chains have been over-expanded for a long
time, wasting resources. This is not a question of a »naive anti-industrialism« (Hans-Jürgen Urban), but rather of an alternative production, of regional cycles of production and reproduction. Let us push the debate around a progressive relationship between selective »de-globalization« and »solidary alter-globalization« (also relevant to the European question) a bit further, instead of the present debate about globalization versus regression to the nation state, which just reproduces the opposition between neoliberals and the far right. A tendency to de-globalization and regionalization of the economy will also help to reduce current account imbalances and export fixation. Certain political competences would actually be taken »back‘« from the international or European level, like the organization of public services, while others, such as the guarantee of (global) social and environmental rights or the regulation of financial markets, would have to be tackled trans- or internationally. This would mean a new relation of decentralization with transnational and transversal mediations (»Vermittlungen«, see the points on democracy and subsidiarity above). On this basis, it is possible to contemplate a new internationalism and many new internationals, which will make global solidarity practical, yet locally anchored.

If transformation is consistently carried out, a liquidation of old industries and destruction of fossil capital (and corresponding resistance to this) will be unavoidable. Certain areas will have to shrink (e.g. resource-intensive areas of industrial production), while others will correspondingly grow (e.g. the entire care economy), though relatively decoupled from growth in material terms. This for instance applies to mobility: the conversion from individual transport using internal combustion engines to collective, smart public transport based on renewable energies will require the development and production of new products, a massive expansion of infrastructures, staff growth, and much more.

Such qualitative growth will be necessary on a transitional basis, not least because of the deficits in many areas of reproduction, but also for the sake of developing an alternative industrial production—this applies above all to countries of the global South. Here, a blunt opposition between pro-growth and post-growth positions is counterproductive. Debates in the global South about Buen Vivir and social-ecological paths of development beyond Western lifestyles point beyond concepts of growth and modernization. Here, too, false oppositions should be avoided. The problem is not »development« in itself, not »modern« civilization, but a specific form of capitalist (or state-socialist) development, and specific social relations of nature. In the medium term, a reproductive economy will
mean that needs and the economy develop qualitatively, but no longer grow quantitatively or in terms of deployed material.

11 // Just transition and universally guaranteed employment: Positive perspectives are needed for those who are worst affected by the climate crisis, as well as for those employees, communities and countries hit by rising costs (e.g. the energy transition) and restructuring (e.g. due to the conversion of industries or de-commissioning, such as the armaments industry). In this sense, just transition initiatives attempt to bring climate justice and the workers’ movement together. Failing that, means repetitious playing-out of »social« against »ecological« interests, or that taking the interests of the lower classes seriously (better environmental conditions and more conscious consumption and good jobs) will remain external, pure lip service. Criteria for such a just transition to a green socialism could be: all measures to be taken must be evaluated according to whether they: 1. significantly contribute to the reduction of green house emissions, 2. to the reduction of poverty and vulnerability, 3. to the reduction of income, gender and other inequalities, 4. promote employment and good work and 5. makes real participation in democratic decision making possible for everyone.

This can be made clearer using the example of the automotive industry. The already enormous pressure of competition is going to increase in the face of rising global over-capacity, promoting centralization and threatening whole production sites and jobs. Restructuring will shape a completely new face of that industry—the keywords are Chinas shift to e-mobility, the loss in jobs due to the production of e-cars (instead of traditional, much more complicated motorization), scandals about the manipulation of emission limits for diesel vehicles, the so-called »digitalization«, and »autonomous cars« and the new competition from tech-giants like google. Representatives of the car industry are already nervous and unsettled. As a preventive measure, state capital aid should be tied in with alternative paths of development and to shares for public property or even full socialization of companies. Public shareholding would have to be combined with expanded participation by employees, trade unions, environmental associations, and the people of the region, for example by creating regional councils, which would decide on concrete steps towards converting the respective automotive group into an ecologically oriented producer for public mobility. Automotive workers threatened with unemployment would discuss, develop, and participate in decision-making processes regarding how a conversion of their industries and a just transition could be organized. Thus various affected people within a company or region
would be able to become protagonists of the change. The transition in mobility will have to be enforced against corporate interests, but in co-operation with employees and their families: they too have an immediate interest in the »compatibility« of adequate living standards, time for family and friends, and liveable natural environments. The end of the combustion engine by 2030 and largely car-free inner cities via massive expansion of (free) public transport correspondent infrastructure in cities and in rural areas would be the concrete medium-term goal.

Workers already know that transformation is on its way. It would be useful to link to their productive pride on the use value of their work: Are we capable to realize a socio-ecological transformation of this industry? And are we capable of a just transition that is securing lots of jobs (especially in metal industries) and a future for this planet? After all even with a reduction of car production by half until 2030 manifold elements of alternative production are needed: the development and expansion of e-bus-systems (trolley systems, autonomous car services etc.), minibuses and paratransit, specialized utility vehicles (fire services, ambulance etc.), rail vehicles (metros, city and intercity railways, freightliner etc.), smart transport management systems, construction of battery, energy and railway infrastructure, development of light weight construction material and so on.

For employees, this will not always mean being able to remain in the same company or in the same industry. In order to prevent fear from socio-ecological transformation (or even reactionary struggles against it by the people affected), guarantees are needed alongside positive perspectives and participation. Alexandra Ocasio-Cortez and Bernie Sanders have thus, in their suggestions for a Green New Deal (cf. Bozuwa in this issue), also adopted Roosevelt’s job guarantee. The transformation is going to demand massive amounts of labour power. Everyone who wants work should have the right to publicly funded, collectively bargained job with »short full time« (meaning between 28 and 32 hours per week). At the same time, such a guarantee would better distribute the work, and moreover break capital’s power to dictate labour conditions, putting an end to precarization.

12 // A new economy: A form of economy that no longer revolves around profit, but rather around the sun of the satisfaction of needs, has a different concept of wealth, and opens onto the prospect of an existence beyond the rat race—of wealth in terms of time, of people being able to develop and vary their activities, of multi-faceted relationships and leisure, of a democratic and solidary way of life. But who is going to pay for all this? Apart from a drastic redistribution in order to correct the enormous inequalities, effected by means of diverse
forms of taxation and expropriation, it is also going to be a question of a different understanding of economy.

...a different social accounting system, one which is user- and demand-oriented and that takes social and natural resources as its starting point.

Capitalist economies are based on the production of commodities for the realization of surplus value, generated by the labour power which creates more value than it costs to reproduce. The fields of public services or state-owned material infrastructures are thus the presuppositions for the reproduction of capital (think of the role of transport networks and school education), but economically they are regarded as derivative: value is supposedly created in the private/capitalist sector, then skimmed off by the state in order to cover its costs in investment and wages. Of course, the state can take out loans, but these too must be paid off at some point through taxation, and hence the absorption of surplus value. According to this model, the state can essentially only spend what it later siphons off from the production of private value through a value transfer—which means we remain in the sphere of redistributive policies.

There are only a few contemporary approaches that admit that social production has its own specific economic quality. Exceptions are, for example, approaches to »public value« (Mazzucato/Ryan-Collins 2019) or »social economy« (Müller 2005 and 2010). If, however, we apply a different social accounting system, one which is user- and demand-oriented
and that takes social and natural resources as its starting point, the question then becomes how and to what end we wish to use the resources that we have. In any case, we need a more thoroughly planned deployment of resources in order to drastically reduce their consumption. This applies not only to material resources, but also to labour power. The social accounting of existing and needed resources would provide a basis, independent of capitalist value transfer, for social production. This brings us directly to the next point.

13 // Participatory planning: The necessity that rapid structural changes be implemented under time pressure, will require elements of participatory planning processes, consultas populares and people’s planning processes, decentralized democratic councils (regional councils were already under discussion during the debate about the automotive and export industries crisis, cf. IG Metall Esslingen 2009) and/or »different layers of planning« (Gindin 2019), as well as cycles of reciprocal coordination, adjustments and new checks-and-balances (what role could commodity markets play in this?).

Imperatively rapid processes of transformation were also brought about by means of planning in the past (e.g. in the USA in the 1930s and 40s). Even Joseph Schumpeter (1942, 193ff), ardent supporter of what he called capitalism’s »creative destruction«, spoke of the »superiority of the socialist blueprint« for rapid transformation. On the issue of rapid transitions, then, socialist positions can make a strong argument—but it should be a matter of participatory planning (Williamson 2010). This is the only way that socialized ownership will be able to break with the old forms of power and property relations. In view of negative experiences with authoritarian-centralist planning, regional experiments could function as a starting point. The democratization and decentralization of existing supra-regional planning processes in the health system, in network planning in the energy and rail sectors, and in education could provide further points from which to proceed. Global planning of materials and resources will doubtless prove more difficult—the experiences of international organizations, or the gigantic archives of logistical experience contained in the transnational corporations, are hardly going to be easy to democratize. (What would socialization along the entire transnational production chains actually look like?) Interrupted experiments in cybernetic democratic planning (in Chile under Allende) should be evaluated and reassessed in light of the present moment. New productive forces and digital capabilities for planning should be used (without overestimating them). Capacities for planning, and their implementation in administration and enterprise, need to be expanded and strengthened, e.g. in housing: the construction of new apartments or schools currently suffers from reduced administrative capacities,
and indeed precisely from cutbacks in planning staff, but also from a lack of appropriate building materials (there being only a few oligopolistic suppliers)—here, in addition to more public sector employees, we would also need public factories, producing, for example, ecologically- and aesthetically-developed serial (panel) buildings with new materials (VEB Platte 3.0⁸), and international architectural contest/exhibition around affordable and green living in the city—what might a popular entry-project look like?

**FOR THE FREE DEVELOPMENT OF EACH**

What is crucial is that all the elements listed aim for the blossoming of the collective ability to act, empowering individuals to become protagonists of their own history. Marx already got to the heart of the matter: a society »in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all.«⁹

It is possible that we are already in a situation having to take a decision: the break with the old neo-liberal and the new authoritarian politics will become a necessity in the face of global inequality, ecological crisis, migrational movements, global authoritarianism, and fascization. A more serious economic downturn would only exacerbate the situation. The »middle way« of post-ideological openness and left-liberal critique will no longer be viable. Forces intervening to maintain liberal freedoms and minimal standards of solidarity must take sides against authoritarianism and neoliberalism, which also means for a more radical left route. In a period of Interregnum where different possibilities remain open, but are already starting to close, now is the time to decide. Barbarism has once more become thinkable—and is the normal case in transformations to a new societal project (whether or not capitalist). A socialist project can thus at the same time appeal to necessity, on the grounds of unsolved and escalating problems of humanity and the danger of barbarism, as well as being fueled by wishes/longings for the future and for concrete utopia. A socialists »narrative« is important—at the same time it has to be as concrete as possible, further developed from the basis of socialist interventions. The adjective »socialist« refers to praxis, not to a finished blueprint.

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1. The debate about the history and future of socialism is a long-time priority for the Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung since the beginning in 1990, combing the good and bad experiences both from the real-existing socialism in Eastern Europe as well as socialist movement and parties in Western Europe.
On the dominant division of labour and feminist-socialist transformation, new forms of cooperation and utopia, see M. Candeias, http://ifg.rosalux.de/files/2011/05/feministisch-sozialistischeTransformation1.pdf

Frigga Haug’s «4-in-1 perspective»; see LuXemburg 2/2011.


The concept of a flexible «short full time» for all is developed by the co-head of the party of DIE LINKE, see Lia Becker and Bernd Rixinger, For the many not the few. Gute Arbeit für Alle! Vorschläge für ein Neues Normalarbeitsverhältnis, in: Sozialismus, supplement to No.9.

VEB: Volksseigener Betrieb (Publicly Owned Enterprise), the main legal form of industrial enterprise in East Germany; such enterprises produced (among other goods) the materials for the Plattenbau, the German version of large-panel system buildings.


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We are in the midst of a defining and pivotal moment for our country and our planet. And, with so many crises converging upon us simultaneously, it is easy for us to become overwhelmed or depressed—or to even throw up our hands in resignation. But my message to you today is that if there was ever a moment in the history of our country where despair was not an option, this is that time. If there was ever a moment where we had to effectively analyze the competing political and social forces which define this historical period, this is that time. If there was ever a moment when we needed to stand up and fight against the forces of oligarchy and authoritarianism, this is that time.

And, if there was ever a moment when we needed a new vision to bring our people together in the fight for justice, decency and human dignity, this is that time.

Today the United States and the rest of the world face two very different political paths. On one hand, there is a growing movement towards oligarchy and authoritarianism in which a small number of incredibly wealthy and powerful billionaires own and control a significant part of the economy and exert enormous influence over the political life of our country.

On the other hand, in opposition to oligarchy, there is a movement of working people and young people who, in ever increasing numbers, are fighting for justice. They are the teachers taking to the streets to make certain that schools are adequately funded and that their students get a quality education.

They are workers at Disney, Amazon, Walmart and the fast food industry standing up and fighting for a living wage of at least $15 an hour and the right to have a union. They are young people taking on the fossil fuel industry and demanding policies that transform our energy system and protect our planet from the ravages of climate change. They are women who refuse to give control of their bodies to local, state and federal politicians. They are people of color and their allies demanding an end to systemic racism and massive
racial inequities that exist throughout our society. They are immigrants and their allies fighting to end the demonization of undocumented people and for comprehensive immigration reform.

**WALL STREET LOVES SOCIALISM**

When we talk about oligarchy, let us be clear about what we mean. Right now, in the United States of America, three families control more wealth than the bottom half of our country, some 160 million Americans. The top 1% own more wealth than the bottom 92% and 49% of all new income generated today goes to the top 1%. In fact, income and wealth inequality today in the United States is greater than at any time since the 1920s.

And when we talk about oligarchy, it is not just that the very rich are getting much richer. It is that tens of millions of working-class people, in the wealthiest country on earth, are suffering under incredible economic hardship, desperately trying to survive.

Today, nearly 40 million Americans live in poverty and tonight, 500,000 people will be sleeping out on the streets. About half of the country lives paycheck to paycheck as tens of millions of our people are an accident, a divorce, a sickness or a layoff away from economic devastation. While many public schools throughout the country lack the resources to adequately educate our young people, we are the most heavily incarcerated nation on earth.

In the USA today the very rich live on average 15 years longer than the poorest Americans.

After decades of policies that have encouraged and subsidized unbridled corporate greed, we now have an economy that is fundamentally broken and grotesquely unfair. Even while macroeconomic numbers like GDP, the stock market and the unemployment rate are strong, millions of middle class and working people struggle to keep their heads above water, while the billionaire class consumes the lion’s share of the wealth that we are collectively creating as a nation.

In the midst of a so-called booming economy real wages for the average worker have barely risen at all. And despite an explosion in technology and worker productivity, the average wage of the American worker in real dollars is no higher than it was 46 years ago and millions of people are forced to work two or three jobs just to survive.

And here is something quite incredible that tells you all you need to know about the results of unfettered capitalism. All of us want to live long, happy, and productive lives, but in the USA today the very rich live on average 15 years longer than the poorest Americans. In 2014, in McDowell County, West Virginia, one of the poorest counties in the nation, life expectancy for men was 64 years. In
Fairfax County, Virginia, a wealthy county, just 350 miles away, life expectancy for men was nearly 82 years, an 18-year differential. The life expectancy gap for women in the two counties was 12 years.

In other words, the issue of unfettered capitalism is not just an academic debate, poverty, economic distress and despair are life-threatening issues for millions of working people in the country. While the rich get richer they live longer lives. While poor and working families struggle economically and often lack adequate health care, their life expectancy is declining for the first time in modern American history.

Taken together, the American Dream of upward mobility is in peril. In fact, if we don’t turn things around, our younger generation will, for the first time in living memory, have a lower standard of living than their parents. This is not acceptable.

Globally, the situation is even more shocking with most of the world’s wealth concentrated among a very few, while billions of people have almost nothing. Today, the world’s richest 26 billionaires now own as much wealth as the poorest 3.8 billion people on the planet—half of the world’s population. But the struggle we are facing today is not just economic.

Across the globe, the movement toward oligarchy runs parallel to the growth of authoritarian regimes—like Putin in Russia, Xi in China, Mohamed Bin Salman in Saudi Arabia, Rodrigo Duterte in the Philippines, Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil, and Viktor Orbán in Hungary among others. These leaders meld corporatist economics with xenophobia and authoritarianism. They redirect popular anger about inequality and declining economic conditions into violent rage against minorities—whether they are immigrants, racial minorities, religious minorities or the LGBT community. And to suppress dissent, they are cracking down on democracy and human rights.

In the United States, of course, we have our own version of this movement—which is being led by President Trump and many of his Republican allies who are attempting to divide our country up and attack these same communities. How sad it is that President Trump sees these authoritarian leaders as friends and allies.

This authoritarian playbook is not new. The challenge we confront today as a nation, and as a world, is in many ways not different from the one we faced a little less than a century ago, during and after the Great Depression in the 1930s. Then, as now, deeply-rooted and seemingly intractable economic and social disparities led to the rise of right-wing nationalist forces all over the world.

In Europe, the anger and despair was ultimately harnessed by authoritarian demagogues who fused corporatism, nationalism, racism and xenophobia into a political movement that amassed totalitarian power, destroyed democracy, and ultimately murdering millions of people—including members of my own family. But we must remember that those were not the only places where dark forces tried to rise up. Today,
we are all rightly repulsed by the sight of neo-Nazis and Klansmen openly marching in Charlottesville, VA, and we are horrified by houses of worship being shot up by right-wing terrorists. But on February 20, 1939, over 20,000 Nazis held a mass rally—not in Berlin, not in Rome, but in Madison Square Garden, in front of a 30-foot-tall banner of George Washington—bordered with swastikas—in New York City.

But back then, those American extremists could not replicate the success of their authoritarian brethren across the ocean because we in the United States, thankfully, made a different choice than Europe did in responding to the era’s social and economic crises. We rejected the ideology of Mussolini and Hitler—we instead embraced the bold and visionary leadership of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, then the leader of the progressive wing of the Democratic Party. Together with organized labor, leaders in the African American community and progressives inside and outside the Party, Roosevelt led a transformation of the American government and the American economy.

They had begun to consider the government of the United States as a mere appendage to their own affairs. We know now that government by organized money is just as dangerous as government by organized mob.

Like today, the quest for transformative change was opposed by big business, Wall Street, the political establishment, by the Republican Party and by the conservative wing of FDR’s own Democratic Party. And he faced the same scare tactics then that we experience today—red baiting, xenophobia, racism and anti-Semitism.

In a famous 1936 campaign speech Roosevelt stated, »We had to struggle with the old enemies of peace—business and financial monopoly, speculation, reckless banking, class antagonism, sectionalism, war profiteering. They had begun to consider the government of the United States as a mere appendage to their own affairs. We know now that government by organized money is just as dangerous as government by organized mob. Never before in all our history have these forces been so united against one candidate as they stand today. They are unanimous in their hate for me—and I welcome their hatred.«

Despite that opposition, by rallying the American people, FDR and his progressive coalition created the New Deal, won four terms, and created an economy that worked for all and not just the few.

Today, New Deal initiatives like Social Security, unemployment compensation, the right to form a union, the minimum wage, protection for farmers, regulation of Wall Street and massive infrastructure improvements are considered pillars of American society. But, while he stood up for the working families of our country, we
can never forget that President Roosevelt was reviled by the oligarchs of his time, who berated these extremely popular programs as »socialism.« Similarly, in the 1960s, when Lyndon Johnson brought about Medicare, Medicaid and other extremely popular programs, he was also viciously attacked by the ruling class of this country.

And here is the point. It is no exaggeration to state, that not only did FDR’s agenda improve the lives of millions of Americans, but the New Deal was enormously popular politically and helped defeat the radical far-right. For a time.

Today, America and the world are once again moving towards authoritarianism—and the same right-wing forces of oligarchy, corporatism, nationalism, racism and xenophobia are on the march, pushing us to make the apocalyptically wrong choice that Europe made in the last century.

Today, we now see a handful of billionaires with unprecedented wealth and power. We see huge private monopolies—operating outside of any real democratic oversight and often subsidized by taxpayers—with the power to control almost every aspect of our lives. They are the profit-taking gatekeepers of our health care, our technology, our finance system, our food supply and almost all of the other basic necessities of life. They are Wall Street, the insurance companies, the drug companies, the fossil fuel industry, the military industrial complex, the prison industrial complex and giant agri-businesses.

They are the entities with unlimited wealth who surround our nation’s capitol with thousands of well-paid lobbyists, who to a significant degree write the laws that we live under.

Today, we have a demagogue in the White House who, for cheap political gain, is attempting to deflect the attention of the American people away from the real crises that we face and, instead, is doing what demagogues always do—and that is divide people up and legislate hatred. This is a president who supports brutal family separations, border walls, Muslim bans, anti-LGBT policies, deportations and voter suppression.

**SOCIALISM AS FIGHTING WORD**

It is my very strong belief that the United States must reject that path of hatred and divisiveness—and instead find the moral conviction to choose a different path, a higher path, a path of compassion, justice and love. It is the path that I call democratic socialism.

Over eighty years ago Franklin Delano Roosevelt helped create a government that made transformative progress in protecting the needs of working families. Today, in the second decade of the 21st century, we must take up the unfinished business of the New Deal and carry it to completion. This is the unfinished business of the Democratic Party and the vision we must accomplish.
In order to accomplish that goal, it means committing ourselves to protecting political rights, to protecting civil rights—and to protect economic rights of all people in this country. As FDR stated in his 1944 State of the Union address: 
»We have come to a clear realization of the fact that true individual freedom cannot exist without economic security and independence.«

Today, our Bill of Rights guarantees the American people a number of important constitutionally protected political rights. And while we understand that these rights have not always been respected and we have so much more work to do, we are proud that our constitution guarantees freedom of religion, freedom of expression, freedom of assembly, a free press and other rights because we understand that we can never have true American freedom unless we are free from authoritarian tyranny.

Now, we must take the next step forward and guarantee every man, woman and child in our country basic economic rights—the right to quality health care, the right to as much education as one needs to succeed in our society, the right to a good job that pays a living wage, the right to affordable housing, the right to a secure retirement, and the right to live in a clean environment. We must recognize that in the 21st century, in the wealthiest country in the history of the world, economic rights are human rights. That is what I mean by democratic socialism.

As Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. said, »Call it democracy, or call it democratic socialism, but there must be a better distribution of wealth within this country for all of God’s children.« To realize this vision, we must not view America only as a population of disconnected individuals, we must also view ourselves as part of an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny,« as Dr. King put it. In other words, we are in this together. We must see ourselves as part of one nation, one community and one society—regardless of race, gender, religion, sexual orientation, or country of origin. This quintessentially American idea is literally emblazoned on our coins: E Pluribus Unum—from the many, one. And, I should tell you, it is enshrined in the motto of our campaign for the presidency—Not me, Us.

But it’s not just Wall Street that loves socialism—when it works for them.

Let me be clear. I do understand that I and other progressives will face massive attacks from those who attempt to use the word »socialism« as a slur. But I should also tell you that I have faced and overcome these attacks for decades—and I am not the only one. Let us remember that in 1932, Republican President Herbert Hoover claimed that Franklin Roosevelt’s New Deal was, »a disguise for the totalitarian state.« In 1936 former Democratic New
York Governor and presidential candidate Al Smith said in a speech about FDR’s New Deal policies, »Just get the platform of the Democratic Party and get the platform of the Socialist Party and lay them down on your dining-room table, side by side.« When President Harry Truman proposed a national health care program, the American Medical Association hired Ronald Reagan as their pitchman. The AMA called the legislation that stemmed from his proposal »socialized medicine« claiming that White House staff were, »followers of the Moscow party line.« In 1960, Ronald Reagan in a letter to Richard Nixon wrote the following about John F. Kennedy: »Under the tousled boyish haircut is still old Karl Marx.« In the 1990s, then Congressman Newt Gingrich claimed President Bill Clinton’s health care plan was »centralized bureaucratic socialism.« The conservative Heritage Foundation has claimed that the Children’s Health Insurance Program (CHIP) was »a step towards socialism.«

Former Speaker of the House John Boehner claimed the stimulus package, the omnibus spending bill and the budget proposed by President Barack Obama were »all one big down payment on a new American socialist experiment.«

In this regard, President Harry Truman was right when he said that: »Socialism is the epithet they have hurled at every advance the people have made in the last 20 years...Socialism is what they called Social Security. Socialism is what they called farm price supports. Socialism is what they called bank deposit insurance. Socialism is what they called the growth of free and independent labor organizations. Socialism is their name for almost anything that helps all the people.«

Now let’s be clear: while President Trump and his fellow oligarchs attack us for our support of democratic socialism, they don’t really oppose all forms of socialism. They may hate democratic socialism because it benefits working people, but they absolutely love corporate socialism that enriches Trump and other billionaires. Let us never forget the unbelievable hypocrisy of Wall Street, the high priests of unfettered capitalism. In 2008, after their greed, recklessness and illegal behavior created the worst financial disaster since the Great Depression—with millions of Americans losing their jobs, their homes and their life savings—Wall Street’s religious adherence to unfettered capitalism suddenly came to an end. Overnight, Wall Street became big government socialists and begged for the largest federal bailout in American history—some $700 billion from the Treasury and trillions in support from the Federal Reserve.

But it’s not just Wall Street that loves socialism—when it works for them. It is the norm across the entire corporate world. The truth is corporate America receives hundreds of billions of dollars in federal support every single year, while these same people are trying to cut programs that benefit ordinary Americans.
If you are a fossil fuel company, whose carbon emissions are destroying the planet, you get billions in government subsidies including special tax breaks, royalty relief, funding for research and development and numerous tax loopholes.

If you are a pharmaceutical company, you make huge profits on patent rights for medicines that were developed with taxpayer funded research.

If you are a monopoly like Amazon, owned by the wealthiest person in America, you get hundreds of millions of dollars in economic incentives from taxpayers to build warehouses and you end up paying not one penny in federal income taxes.

If you are the Walton family, the wealthiest family in America, you get massive government subsidies because your low wage workers are forced to rely on food stamps, Medicaid and public housing in order to survive—all paid for by taxpayers.

If you are the Trump family, you got $885 million worth of tax breaks and subsidies for your family’s housing empire that is built on racial discrimination.

When Trump screams socialism, all of his hypocrisy will not be lost on the American people. Americans will know that he is attacking all that we take for granted: from Social Security to Medicare to veterans health care to roads and bridges to public schools to national parks to clean water and clean air. When Trump attacks socialism, I am reminded of what Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. said, »This country has socialism for the rich, rugged individualism for the poor.«

And that is the difference between Donald Trump and me. He believes in corporate socialism for the rich and powerful. I believe in a democratic socialism that works for the working families of this country.

What I believe is that the American people deserve freedom—true freedom. Freedom is an often used word but it’s time we took a hard look at what that word actually means. Ask yourself: what does it actually mean to be free?

For an economic bill of rights

Are you truly free if you are unable to go to a doctor when you are sick, or face financial bankruptcy when you leave the hospital? Are you truly free if you cannot afford the prescription drug you need to stay alive? Are you truly free when you spend half of your limited income on housing, and are forced to borrow money from a payday lender at 200% interest rates. Are you truly free if you are 70 years old and forced to work because you lack a pension or enough money to retire? Are you truly free if you are unable to go to attend college or a trade school because your family lacks the income? Are you truly free if you are forced to work 60 or 80 hours a week because you can’t find a job that pays a living wage? Are you truly free if you are a mother or father with a new...
born baby but you are forced to go back to work immediately after the birth because you lack paid family leave? Are you truly free if you are a small business owner or family farmer who is driven out by the monopolistic practices of big business? Are you truly free if you are a veteran, who put your life on the line to defend this country, and now sleep out on the streets? To me, the answer to those questions, in the wealthiest nation on earth, is no, you are not free.

While the Bill of Rights protects us from the tyranny of an oppressive government, many in the establishment would like the American people to submit to the tyranny of oligarchs, multinational corporations, Wall Street banks, and billionaires.

It is time for the American people to stand up and fight for their right to freedom, human dignity and security. This is the core of what my politics is all about.

In 1944, FDR proposed an economic bill of rights but died a year later and was never able to fulfil that vision. Our job, 75 years later, is to complete what Roosevelt started. That is why today, I am proposing a 21st Century Economic Bill of Rights. A Bill of Rights that establishes once and for all that every American, regardless of his or her income is entitled to:

- The right to a decent job that pays a living wage
- The right to quality health care
- The right to a complete education
- The right to affordable housing
- The right to a clean environment
- The right to a secure retirement

Over the course of this election my campaign has been releasing—and will continue to release—detailed proposals addressing each of these yet to be realized economic rights. We will also address the attacks that are being launched each day against the civil rights and civil liberties of our people.

And let me be absolutely clear: democratic socialism to me requires achieving political and economic freedom in every community.

And let me also be clear, the only way we achieve these goals is through a political revolution—where millions of people get involved in the political process and reclaim our democracy by having the courage to take on the powerful corporate interests whose greed is destroying the social and economic fabric of our country.

At the end of the day, the one percent may have enormous wealth and power, but they are just the one percent. When the 99 percent stand together, we can transform society. These are my values, and that is why I call myself a democratic socialist. At its core is a deep and abiding faith in the American people to peacefully and democratically enact the transformative change that will create shared prosperity, social equality and true freedom for all.

Speech at George Washington University, June, 12, 2019.
photo: flickr/tetedelacourse
In 2010, it was shocking enough to say we were socialists. Before the Occupy movement, young socialists in America were scattered here and there among small political magazines, lonely chapters of socialist organizations in decline, and unions whose leaderships were inevitably to their right. The rise of Occupy was part of a wave of social movements dominated by young people that began with Occupy in Zuccotti Park in 2011 and continued through the Black Lives Matter movement beginning in 2013, Bernie Sanders’s 2016 Democratic-Socialist election campaign, and now the global movement against climate change.

Occupy popularized the language of the 99 percent, which put class struggle into a language that class-averse Americans could identify with. It named its villain: Wall Street. And it brought all the individuals harboring rebellious political opinions, but were alone, into community. It began to solidify a denser network of leftists in America.

It was almost natural that socialism would appeal to a generation that came to political consciousness after 1989, and for whom capitalism, not communism, was the obvious oppressor. Capitalism no longer meant freedom, but its opposite: debt, precarious work, the highest rate of incarceration in the world. Many of the participants in Occupy were downwardly mobile young people who had done what parents and politicians had told them to do, and they were furious first that society had not held up its end of the bargain and second, that when they protested, police attacked them.

Sanders may have been a white, rather old man… but his base is more working class, younger, and more diverse.

This experience with policing encouraged solidarity between those who had organized during Occupy with the Black Lives Matter movement, which activists organized in response to the unpunished murders of black people by vigilantes and police. BLM was and remains a movement of many organizations host to...
a range of political positions, some being anti-capitalist.

It was the 2016 Sanders primary campaign against Hillary Clinton and its aftermath that brought a loosely defined socialism to a national stage. Sanders may have been a white, rather old man, but he ran away with the youth vote during the primary. Liberal opponents derided him for representing an old working class past and for having little to say about race and gender. On the latter point, they were sometimes right. But following his extraordinary campaign, he endorsed several candidates who were young women of color, including Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez. Today, the growing ranks of elected socialists are young, diverse, and partly thanks to Sanders, unafraid to run as socialists. The Democratic Socialists of America (who roughly share Sanders’s politics, but of which he is not a member) grew massively after the Sanders campaign, from a few thousand nationwide to about 50,000. The organization has proved itself effective in electoral campaigns; candidates are willing to gamble on calling themselves socialists to get the door knocking power of DSA.

The Democratic primary for the 2020 election will prove a testing ground for the next phase of socialism in the United States. Sanders’s two major opponents are Joe Biden, a popular warmed-over centrist Democrat prone to gaffes, and Elizabeth Warren, the populist senator and Harvard Law professor from Massachusetts. It is the latter candidate who raises fundamental questions about how we use the term »socialism« in the United States.

Warren and Sanders are allies in the Senate and share many of the same policies. While Sanders was the electoral
expression of waves of radicalism starting in 2011, Warren represents the degree to which the radicalism of the last decade has become accepted in mainstream politics. Some political analysts said that Sanders should accept that she has assumed his mantle and step aside. Socialists have bristled at this because, while Sanders has identified as a socialist for his entire career, Warren describes herself as »capitalist to my bones«. How do two candidates with these radically different identifications agree on so much?

Until now, both Sanders and America’s young socialists have offered a flexible definition of socialism. Sanders refers to the New Deal and often calls for a return to Keynesian economics with a vague North Star of socialism. The young generation of socialists has a range of tendencies, some closer to Sanders and some more radical. Using the term socialism broadened the Overton Window; for years, Republicans had described any social welfare policy as socialist, and Democrats had shrunk in fear. Using the term restored confidence to anyone left of the party, and some people in it, and that confidence lent charisma to political positions that had been marginal. Now, when confronted with a capitalist-identified candidate who looks similar on paper, socialists use the term »socialism« not just as a counterpoint to »casino capitalism,« as Sanders does, but to describe a plan and a vision that is distinctly socialist.

While Sanders has identified as a socialist for his entire career, Warren describes herself as »capitalist to my bones«.
Constituency concerns, theories of change, and a long-term vision for organizing society shape the contours of 21st century socialism, as articulated in the presidential race. First, the question of constituency: socialists have pointed out that Sanders’s base is more working class, younger, and more diverse, while Warren’s base is more educated, professional and white. Building a long-term socialist movement needs a movement that looks like the one at Sanders’ back. Some have noted, though, that the left would do well to remember that downwardly mobile professionals—from teachers to social workers to indebted law school graduates—increasingly share the interests of more traditional sectors of the working class, and will be a necessary and valuable part of any strong movement.

Movement building is bound up with the candidates’ theories of political change: Sanders has an antagonistic relationship with the existing party leadership, would be likely to seriously renovate and reshape the party, and would bring outsiders into the White House. If his candidacy is any sign, he would recognize that a mobilized mass movement is the only way to fight capital and make gains. Warren, whose populism is expressed through detailed policies and expertise, and who has a good relationship with party leaders, condemns »corrupt« financiers but believes that business deserves a seat at the table in solving crises like global warming. Socialists in America are increasingly finding their way to a more antagonistic politics that articulates movement building as the necessary precondition for defeating capitalists, not making them more ethical.

Though efforts to articulate the difference between Sanders and Warren have forced us to discuss what sort of socialist future we want. Subtle differences in the candidates’ plans have forced a discussion about whether social goods like education should be more accessible or entirely decommodified. A socialist future has to reject the entire framework of »preserving the middle class,« an idea that has always rested on ideas of aspirational self-improvement, and investment in property and education. Instead, socialists are demanding, and must demand, that social goods be taken off the market entirely, and that we eschew the confusing idea of the middle class—that seemingly virtuous class without antagonists—in favor of the idea that everyone deserves to flourish.

By using the term socialism, we have moved politics to the left, and we have put a stake in the ground. Now that the word is popular, and many of our policies, like Medicare for All, are absorbed by the Democratic Party, we can flesh out our politics further and insist that we aim higher than America at mid-century. That many young people are resisting attempts to turn socialism into something more palatable to capitalists is a sign that socialism is still a politics on the rise.
Thinking a socialist future implies imagining what this future might look like, and then asking how we can get there. Utopia, as conceived by revolutionary theory, implies a pragmatic aspect relating to the question of transition. Transition is a challenge. History has shown that it is not linear: no direct path leading from one point to another exists. Instead, we need to consider transition as a process. Feminist body politics aimed at dismantling rigid norms of gender and sexuality show that revolutions take time. The temporal space created by this, however, opens up a field for exploration and experimentation, a terrain on which contradictory forces clash. Is it possible to walk such a transitional path without knowing where it will lead?

This political movement is founded on a temporality that is directed toward the production of the present. We can see that revolutionary desire requires a solid infrastructure in order to come to fruition. The struggles now unfolding in Chile and across the globe against neoliberal privatization, the destruction of welfare provisions, and the progressive commodification of our lives stand in a largely inverse relation to such a revolutionary temporality. Their project is less future-orientated than it is invested in defending something lost or something perceived as under threat. These are struggles for the commons, struggles to confront ongoing dispossession, or demanding the return of stolen wealth: struggles showing that our utopias need foundations to turn into a reality. We need functioning structures of care and self-care to find the energy to fight in the first place. Should this lead us to conclude that these struggles are more conservative, or backward-looking than they are utopian? No. They entail a utopian thrust in their knowledge of the conditions from which they initiate transformation. For this reason, these are now decisive and indispensible struggles. Taking self-defence as a starting point, they spawn the possibility of something new; they bring
to light something that has not existed. They found this political movement on a temporality that is not nostalgic or archaic, but directed toward producing the present. We can see that revolutionary desire requires a solid infrastructure to come to fruition.

Rosa Luxemburg coined the concept of a revolutionary realpolitik to grasp transition with greater precision, as a process in which day-to-day struggles for concrete improvements take place against the horizon of a radical reorganization of society, and in which struggles in the here and now, in grassroots politics, pave the way for the steps to follow. The teleology of an ultimate revolutionary »goal« shifts. Not because it no longer exists or loses importance, but because the temporal relation to everyday politics has changed. We can and must question every act, whether it is imbued with revolutionary dynamism or not.

»We want to change everything!«

I consider this concept helpful for sharpening the revolutionary perspective of current feminisms. What are their goals? What utopian energies do they unleash? To what extent can we see them as a revolutionary realpolitik of the future even when they do not have a stable idea of what their goal is? In what way, do they revolutionize the present and create the conditions for a different future?

In their determination and radical nature, contemporary feminisms are initiating radical breaks—in our bodies, on the streets, in bed, and in the household. The slogan of the feminist movement in Argentina sums them up: »We want to change everything!« With the most recent revolts in Chile, this claim has been further sharpened, with the feminist revolution positing that »We have a programme: We want everything!«. There is no space, no social relations that remain untouched by this dynamic of rupture and revolt. The time of revolution lies in the here and now, its energized force linking it to the perspective of a liberated future.

From its origins in Latin America, the energy of the transnational feminist strike has spread to over 50 countries. In Chile, the masses have taken up many of the slogans and practices of the feminist strike and have assumed even greater force as a plurinational general strike. The experience gained in various movements over recent years has made it possible to change even the way we struggle, the organizational forms, the political perspectives, and the historical alliances. In this context, two central mechanisms of domination are being attacked: the burden of debt being placed on subaltern subjects, and the expropriation this brings with it, both of which have rendered impossible a self-determined future for large parts of the population.

As a financial obligation, debt colonizes our future. It chains us to ex-
exploitation with a tightly-knit dispositif of moralizing admonishment and individualization. Conservative neoliberalism has thoroughly recolonized the Latin America financially. These are the conditions under which an indebted, and thus highly disciplined, younger generation has grown up, its lack of independence intensified by the centrality of the hetero-patriarchal family. The struggle against debt is about re-appropriating our future and making it our own, creatively shaping it on an individual and a collective level, and finding new subjectivities that can escape such a »debt relation«.

The graffiti and slogans of the Chilean protests express this all. On the facades of banks in Chile, home of the Chicago Boys and the highest per capita debt in the entire region, it says: »They owe us a life.« This statement reverses the question of who owes what to whom. Considering surging living costs, or, to be more precise, counting the progressive extraction of value from daily practices of social reproduction, this slogan points to the possibility of financial disobedience—the #EvasionMasiva movement is a prime example.

Current feminist movements go even further, formulating a concrete and pointed critique of the multiple and new forms of predatory exploitation by which capital reaches ever further into our lives. Bodies are fighting shoulder to shoulder on many fronts: those of household debt and precarization, neo-extractivism and the devastation and desertion of entire regions, militarization and the criminalization of borders, and scapegoating »internal enemies«.

Feminist revolution creates a site of political antagonism by fighting for the means of the production of life.

These are struggles that question the role of property. In doing so, the feminist revolution creates a site of political antagonism by fighting for means of producing life wherever neoliberal exploitation takes root. In this respect, feminism as a quotidian revolution is significant, because it poses the question of whether the sites at which the accumulation of capital is opposed might determine the direction of transformation.

Today, even the bodies of young people are sites of contestation where capital is attempting to expand its value creation, to mould them into obedient workers who obediently accept precarization, debt, and the nuclear family—even if the latter is imploding and brimming with violence. In these bodies, the feminist revolution has planted the desire for revolution, the promise of a future not regulated by capital—opening up the concrete production of utopia.

Translation by Lisa Jeschke and Joel Scott for Gegensatz Translation Collective
Protest against the price increases in public transport in Santiago de Chile, October 2019. This and all images on the following pages were taken by the photo collective © Migrar Photo
1 // Extrapolating Marx’s statements, Lenin characterized the revolutionary transition as a non-state state. This compound of contradictions made it possible to describe a paradox: strengthen state power to shatter bourgeois positions and start the transition to a communist association of producers. It referred to a revolutionary institution: the »Soviet« or workers’ council that existed across Europe. Even if Lenin’s invention never came into effect, we can assume that the non-state state continues to describe the essence—and the difficulty—of any transition beyond structures of social domination. In all later revolutionary stages—but also in the socialization experiments of the 20th century, which did not question the capitalist framework—the problem of the »transition« also concerns the contradictory compound of a non-market market; or, a permanent constraining of market autonomy in favour of a politics that does not do away with capitalism but merely »reigns it in«. And in the context of the ongoing environmental catastrophe, we need to think the contradiction of a non-industrial industry, which might be conceptualized as »degrowth«. These contradictions are asymmetrical: they confront power with a counter-power that is not only different in character, but works otherwise. This is where we meet the opportunities and risks of revolutionary experiments.

Planning will be even more necessary if its aim is not to accelerate industrial development, but to organize a »de-industrialization« that is not accompanied by a collapse in living conditions.

2 // The revolutionary contradictions noted are not independent of one another. We can assume, for instance, that a non-market will not be possible without state intervention or support, to plan, which requires an administrative body and corresponding legislature. Planning will be even more necessary if its aim is not to accelerate industrial development, but to organize a »de-industrialization« unaccompanied
by a collapse in living conditions. Also, 20th-century experiments with planning hardly touched on the financial structures of the credit and money economy. And the issue at hand also changes with the transition from a national to a global scale. But what might the corresponding forms of democratic participation or mass mobilization be? We get a sense of this problem in the notion of a »global civil society«, with its networks of associations and campaigns of solidarity.

Political developments are unpredictable. They depend on situations in which highly different strains of action come together, each with their own temporality. Theory can only describe and evaluate the »actors« that contribute to change. In contemporary theory, this problem has often been conceptualized as one of the convergence of different interests and of choosing between different »hegemonies« that hierarchize these interests. Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe have done significant work in this respect. But their idea of an »empty signifier« has benefitted a »populism« easily appropriated by nationalism, unfortunately. The heart of the matter lies not only in social interests but also in the modalities of political action (or agency) that could shape a socialist project. By referring to the elements of programme, regulation, insurrection, and utopia, I want to clarify that these forms of action differ qualitatively in terms of the level they are situated on, their institutional form, and the »subjects« that they construct.

With the realization that environmental catastrophe is already underway, and irreversibly so, we need to drop the ideology of progress elaborated nowhere more dynamically than by socialism. Yet it is not the idea that progress is necessary that is in »decline«, rather only the idea that all progress is ideologically inscribed in a totalizing evolution that coincides with the progression of history as such. However we do not seek to replace this ideology with that of a collapse that leads to the end of history—a nihilist version of the conclusions drawn by some regarding the final triumph of a liberalism underpinned by self-regulated markets. We are instead looking for alternatives that are always present within a negative process. A process which, though unstoppable, can take on more or less threatening forms. The thesis argued for here is that the possibility of an alternative depends on whether, in the years ahead, world politics will tend to one or another form of socialism. This is what both the reorganization of societies depends on and the opportunity to force capitalism to address priorities other than the maximization of profits. This means that a shift in the changes in humanity’s relationship with nature requires an acceleration of changes in the relations between human beings.
Imagine socialism freed from everything that bothers you

Ask yourself who would be especially bothered by it then No one but him is and remains really your enemy

(Erich Fried)

Why Socialism? was the title of an essay written by an exiled German intellectual which appeared in the very first issue of the US socialist magazine Monthly Review. The author’s name? Albert Einstein—physicist, inventor of the theory of relativity, and committed socialist. In his essay, the man responsible for revolutionizing science set out why he believed the future had to be socialist (Einstein, 1949).

Four years prior, the most horrific catastrophe and crime in the history of mankind ended. In the 1930s, capitalism had descended into its worst crisis to date, sweeping aside young liberal democracies almost everywhere, and resulting in the rise of extreme right-wing forces in Germany set on fomenting a new world war to facilitate the colonization of new territories in Eastern Europe to take control of resources, markets, and land. Because of this war, remaining the deadliest to date, in which up to 80 million lost their lives—the majority of whom were civilians. The
country which Einstein, as a German Jew had been forced to flee, began the war. In this war, Nazi Germany murdered six million Jews on an industrial scale, and in the socialist Soviet Union in particular, German fascism waged its war of conquest as a systematic war of annihilation. The German »Generalplan Ost« (Master Plan for the East) foresaw the displacement and murder of at least 30 million Slavic people through execution, forced starvation, and death by forced labour. By the end of the war, 27 million Soviet citizens were dead. Only as a result of a tense combined effort was the Soviet Union able to overcome the German onslaught and go ahead to liberate the concentration and extermination camps in Eastern Europe. The USA’s entrance into the war contributed to the Allies’ ultimate defeat of Nazi Germany. In retribution, Germany’s civilian population was subject to a remorseless Allied bombing campaign and the destruction of many German cities (see Deppe, Salomon and Solty 2011, 27−41).

After the war, capitalism found itself discredited. In the Far East, a communist revolution succeeded in 1949 in China—which had suffered the most brutal of occupations at the hands of imperial Japan—and quickly spread to the Korean peninsula and toward Vietnam. Meanwhile, in a decimated continental Europe, anti-capitalist forces were gathering strength. In Italy and France, the international communist movement had sustained liberation movements in both countries, and thus both nations’ communist parties developed into huge parties of the masses with enormous influence on the population. In the United Kingdom, a very left-wing social-democratic government came to power and set about founding the British welfare state. In Greece, a civil war raged with a strong communist presence. In Eastern Europe, socialists had taken (and then consolidated) power in the course of the Soviet march on Berlin: one third of the world was part of the international communist movement at that time.

In Germany, too, the socialist spirit was once again on the rise: in the western occupied zones, for example, the 1947 state constitution of Hesse was based on the most progressive and anticapitalist constitutions that had emerged through the 1930s and 1940s, including the Soviet constitution of 1936, the new US Bill of Rights proposed as part of the New Deal, and the new post-war constitutions drawn up in France and Italy (cf. Canfora, 2006, 259−82). The Hesse constitution planned for the extensive implementation of socialist policies. The anti-capitalist mood was evident even among the Christian conservative movement, specifically in the »Ahlen Programme« put forward by the CDU in 1947, which stated that »the capitalist economic system has failed to operate in favour of the political and social interests of the German people. The only possible answer to the terrible political, economic, and social collapse brought
about by a criminal, power-driven form of politics, is a fundamental reorganization. The content and goal of this new social and economic order can no longer be based on the capitalist pursuit of power and profit, but must instead ensure the welfare of our people. Through an economic system based on public ownership (eine gemeinwirtschaftliche Ordnung), the German people shall obtain an economic and social charter that corresponds to the rights and the dignity of human beings, one that will serve the moral and material regeneration of our people and guarantee peace both at home and abroad« (CDU Zone Committee of the British Zone, 1947, 15). It was only the acceleration of the Cold War and the integration of the entirety of West Germany into the sphere of US-dominated capitalism that put a stop to socialist endeavours in these regions, a process variously described by historians and social scientists as »enforced capitalism«, an »impeded reorganization«, and »restoration in West Germany« (see Schmidt 1971; Schmidt and Fichter 1978; and Huster et al. 1994; Dahn 2010, 37–44).

In East Germany, however, things proceeded differently. In the Soviet-occupied zones, the economic structure that had laid the foundations for fascism was thoroughly dismantled: the big landowners who, as military aristocracy, had supported Hitler and brought him to power before spearheading the Wehrmacht’s war of annihilation, were summarily disempowered; now it was »Junker lands in farmers’ hands«, as the slogan had it. The Nazis had sought to solve agricultural problems through settler-colonialism, sending the older siblings of estates that were barely economically viable and no longer able to
be further divided as settlers to occupied Eastern Europe (»Lebensraum in the East« for the »people without space«), instead of intervening to deprive the Junkers of some of their economic and social power. In addition, German war plans had envisaged resettling a further four to 12 million Germans in depopulated regions of the Soviet Union. Now, the situation had radically changed: a destitute rural population was finally able to stake out their own patch—and not via imperialist means. This merely changed when, for reasons of productivity and the necessities of building socialism, land finally became public property during the collectivization of East German agriculture, providing rural workers with heavy agricultural machinery as well as vacation time.

At the same time, the major industrial concerns in Soviet-occupied zones which had supported Hitler and profited from the war were expropriated and transferred into public ownership. In a referendum held in the state of Saxony in June 1946, 77.7 percent of the population voted in favour of large-scale socializations. The nationalization processes agreed upon in December 1918 during the German Revolution by the moderate social-democratic Imperial Congress of the »workers’ and soldiers’ councils« (see Schütrumpf, Sonnenberg and Solty 2019) and supported, at that time too, by the general populace, had also formed the core of the SPD’s projected post-war programme in West Germany; ironically, it was in East Germany, at least, that the SPD’s post-war goals were now actually being implemented (Dahn 2010, 38). Here, under the protection of the USSR, victims of Nazi fascism returning from concentration camps or exile took over political power.

The result of these developments is an oligarchy of private capital, the enormous power of which cannot be effectively checked even by a democratically organized political society. (Einstein)

The links between capitalism, its brutal crises, the rise of fascist forces, and world war, the connections between Kapitalismus, Krise und Krieg (capitalism, crisis, and war, cf. Gill and Solty, 2013)—were etched into the minds of the post-war population. Einstein was far from alone in thinking the reconstruction to take place following crisis, fascism, and war could only do so within a socialist framework. The phrase »socialism or barbarism«, first formulated by Karl Kautsky and Rosa Luxemburg before the outbreak of World War I, now enjoyed common currency. Barbarism was already experienced first-hand. Einstein was clear in his conviction that the capitalist private sector should be replaced with planned, socialist public enterprise, because under capitalism »[p]rivate capital tends to become concentrated in few hands,
partly because of competition among the capitalists, and partly because technological development and the increasing division of labor encourage the formation of larger units of production at the expense of smaller ones. The result of these developments is an oligarchy of private capital, the enormous power of which cannot be effectively checked even by a democratically organized political society. This is true since the members of legislative bodies are selected by political parties, largely financed or otherwise influenced by private capitalists who, for all practical purposes, separate the electorate from the legislature. The consequence is that the representatives of the people do not in fact sufficiently protect the interests of the underprivileged sections of the population. Moreover, under existing conditions, private capitalists inevitably control, directly or indirectly, the main sources of information (press, radio, education). It is thus extremely difficult, and indeed in most cases quite impossible, for the individual citizen to come to objective conclusions and to make intelligent use of his political rights (Einstein 1949). For Einstein, socialism concerned the realization of true democracy.

SOCIALISM’S IDEOLOGICAL CRISIS (1989–2007)

After 1949 history followed a different direction to the one Einstein had hoped for. In West Germany, the advent of the Cold War snuffed out the socialist hopes and aspirations of the post-war period. The same year Einstein published his essay, his homeland was divided into the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) and the German Democratic Republic (GDR). The existence of two German states did not reflect an internal German border; instead, both functioned as outposts of two nuclear superpowers struggling for global supremacy (Füllberth 2007). The partition of Germany and the Cold War entailed that the short period of workers’ self-management in the Soviet-occupied Zone and young GDR, which had emerged when local capitalists fled from the Red Army and expropriation (taking their patents, databases of customers and some engineers with them), was also terminated (Roesler 1978; Füllberth 2007, 31–46). The conceptions of an independent German path towards socialism, as they are associated with the name of Anton Ackermann (2005) were never realized.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s, socialism gained traction around the world as part of a broader left-wing movement sweeping the globe. Its three pillars—labour movements in the West, »real socialism« in the East, and anti-colonial socialist liberation movements in the Global South—were enjoying a period of particular strength, while the West found itself descending into another deep crisis, that of Fordist capitalism (cf. Harvey 2007, 39–63; Deppe et al. 2011: 41–56).

Unfortunately, the Western ruling classes’ project of »neoliberal globalization« successfully pushed back against this leftward shift. At home, they seriously weakened the trade-union movement, which was
then forced to adopt a highly defensive position, while abroad they were able to maintain control over newly-independent countries in the Global South via the debt crisis, which forced these countries to integrate themselves into the capitalist world market and conform to the neoliberal conditions set out by the credit-lending West—including the abolition of protective tariffs, the privatization of publicly owned enterprises, and the deregulation of markets. At around the same time, real socialism in the East was beginning to stagnate (cf. Deppe et al. 2011, 57–67).

The 1991 collapse of (state) socialism in the Eastern Bloc seemed to herald the end of a socialist alternative to capitalism. In 1992, the socialist intellectual Perry Anderson wrote that »[t]he historical potential of socialism as a whole appears to be entirely exhausted in ways similar to that of liberalism fifty years ago« (Anderson 1993, 169). After the events of 1989/1990, bourgeois Western intellectuals proclaimed the »end of history«: according to Francis Fukuyama’s now-famous essay, there is no alternative beyond a capitalist market economy and liberal democracy (Fukuyama 1992). On university campuses, even representatives of the left were in agreement with the prevailing mood when many of them drew on the French philosopher Lyotard (1986) and the U.S. American intellectual Richard Rorty and their postulation of the »end of grand narratives«, leading some Marxism-oriented critical intellectuals to consider postmodern thought as the ideological expression of neoliberal capitalism (Harvey 1990, 44–46; Callinicos 2003, 11–22; Wolin 2004; Amin 2004; Sanbonmatsu 2005). As early as 1991, the British political scientist and Trotskyist Alex Callinicos noted that Fukuyama’s »end of history« thesis was »merely a variation on one of the dominant cultural themes of the 1980s...« (Callinicos 1991, 9).

Thus were the bourgeois Western intellectuals able to claim victory—and a very profitable one for them at that—although the central questions that the socialism of the 19th and 20th centuries had sought to answer remained as urgent as ever, particularly given the existence of a now globalized form of capitalism (Anderson 1993, 170; Bobbio 1994, 88–90). This was true with respect to the social question and rising inequality, the spatially divergent development of market-driven societies (both within individual nation states and their cities as well as between global capitalist centres and the periphery), the democratic question, and the metabolic interaction between humanity and nature, among other things (see also Hobsbawm 1996, 558–85).

Ultimately, many seemed resigned to the idea that there was no alternative to capitalism. The British intellectual Mark Fisher, who died well before his time, named this »capitalist realism« (Fisher 2013), where we live in a world in which it is easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism.
Bourgeois-liberal opinion-makers such as Milton Friedman, Fukuyama, Thomas L. Friedman, and Samuel Huntington had asserted that capitalism—particularly in the specific form of financialized neoliberal capitalism—allows for stability, innovation, and efficiency, and that the superiority of market-capitalist organization in comparison with all other organizational forms would also lead to a process of democratization (see for example Friedman 2002, 30–45). The superiority of the combination of liberal capitalism with representative democracy would end all alternatives. These notions covered up the fact that, during the 1920s and 1930s, economic liberalism had been willing to form coalitions with fascism to protect capitalist private property from popular socialization measures. For instance, in his classic text »Liberalism«, economic liberalism’s key intellectual Ludwig von Mises argued that »Fascism and similar movements aiming at establishing dictatorships are full of the best intentions«, insofar as they »suppress socialist ideas and (...) persecute the people who spread them«; and Mises praised fascism as an »intervention« that had »saved European civilization. The merit that Fascism has thereby won for itself will live on eternally in history« (Mises 2005, 29–30). The neoliberal creed covered up the fact that neoliberalism’s single most-influential thinker Milton Friedman and his »Chicago Boys« themselves formed a pact with General Pinochet’s fascism in Chile, which had overthrown with the help of the CIA, the democratically elected socialist government of Salvador Allende, to use the South American country as a test lab for the enforcement of the »free market« (Klein 2008, 56–152). From this strain of thought now emerged the ideology of alternativelessness, neatly summarized by Margaret Thatcher’s dictum »There is No Alternative« (TINA) which Angela Merkel echoed in 2011, at the peak of the Eurozone crisis, when she called for a »market-compliant democracy« in Angela Merkel’s demand for a »market-compliant democracy« (quoted from Brunkhorst 2017).

This TINA ideology became so pervasive that after 1989 it was able to subsume the erstwhile social-democratic opposition to bourgeois-liberal capitalist parties in the West. The crisis of state socialism broadened to envelop the whole left, and classic social-democratic parties saw themselves transformed into neoliberal ones, with examples including the New Democrats, New Labour, and the »New Centre« (see Candeias 2004, 329–41; Solty 2007 and 2008; and Nachtwey 2009). Their key intellectuals adopted right-wing economic doctrine under the moniker of »common sense«, as if it were suddenly »beyond left and right« (Giddens 1997). Margaret Thatcher hit the nail on the head when she said that her greatest achievement was a New Labour led by the neoliberal Tony Blair, because »[w]e forced our opponents to change their minds« (quoted from Burns 2008).
CAPITALISM’SIDEOLOGICALCRISIS
(2007—2020)

Capitalism’s promise for the future, however, went up in smoke with the global financial crisis. The idea that capitalism provided economic and political stability, innovation, and efficiency had long predominated, but by the time of the crisis in 2007, at the latest, it had begun to lose credibility, particularly in the Global South. Firstly, the notion that financialized neoliberal capitalism leads to stability was shown to be absurd by the constant economic and financial crises that neoliberal capitalism produced. Whether through the New York banking crisis of 1987, the Mexican crisis of 1994–1995, the Asian financial crisis of 1997–1998, the crisis in Russia from 1998–1999, the Argentinian crisis (1998–2002) the dot-com crash (2000–2002) in the USA, or the global financial crisis that has persisted since 2007, neoliberal capitalism has shown itself to be immensely unstable (Huffschmid 1999; Brenner 2002; McNally 2010). The bank bailouts and policies of austerity that followed the global financial crisis proved to be extremely unpopular and resulted in large protest movements emerging all around the world (Mason 2012; Gallas et al. 2012; Schmalz and Weinmann 2013; Candeias and Völpel 2014; Solty 2014).

Gone, secondly, is the notion that liberal capitalism provides political stability. Declared to be lacking in alternatives, and implemented in the name of competitiveness, the deregulation of labour markets and the reorganization of Keynesian welfare states into punitive workfare institutions meant the expansion of low-wage sectors that eroded social security, spread fears of unemployment and downward social mobility right through to the middle classes, and led to a breakdown in solidarity (Dörre 2008). The implementation of these unpopular measures resulted in a crisis of representation, as evidenced in declining voter turnout, decreased voter share for the old major parties, and the rise of extreme right-wing parties, as well as the emergence of new left-wing parties (see Solty and Gill 2013; Solty 2016b, Candeias 2018). At the same time, this splintering of the party-political system has also made it more difficult to manage the crises efficiently. Right at a moment that calls for strong parties with the ability to show leadership (Poulantzas 1974, 75), these parties turn into apparatuses entirely absorbed by particular interests and tactical manoeuvring (Solty 2019e). Around the world, we see liberal democracy losing its stronghold, with charismatic authoritarian leadership figures—such as Donald Trump in the USA, Lalit Modi in India, Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil, Rodrigo Duterte in the Philippines, Jarosław Aleksander Kaczyński in Poland, and Viktor Orbán in Hungary—taking power around the world (Beck and Stützle 2018; Candeias 2019). It is the hour of »strongmen« (Rilling 2017). Simultaneously, liberal capitalism has itself become even more authoritarian (Deppe 2013; Bruff 2014). The best exam-
ple of this is the European Fiscal Compact, which required that EU states make cuts to social services, with the decline of Greece merely the tip of the iceberg (Oberndorfer 2013; Ryner 2016; Streeck 2016, 113–42). Another example is the brutal repression of the social protest movements against the pension cuts enforced by the government of Emmanuel Macron in France. Even neoliberals admit that the democracy supposed to follow hot on the heels of market liberalization processes currently finds itself in a state of retreat (Kurlantzick 2013; Przeworski 2019). And even Wolfgang Streeck, erstwhile advisor to Third Way social democrats in Germany, postulated the end of democratic capitalism (Streeck, 2016, 73–94).

These neoliberal mouthpieces of yore look at the Chinese one-party system almost with envy.

At this point, however, the question of the political form of capitalism, of why contemporary crisis capitalism has not in fact led to more democracy, of the »forms of bourgeois rule« (Kühnl 1971) and of authoritarian state forms in capitalism (Neumann 1986) takes on a new significance (see Solty 2018b).

In reality, even liberal market democracy’s mouthpieces no longer hold firm to their own formerly-held beliefs. The idea that capitalism has become oligarchic, and that the growing influence of lobbyists and big money has also made it plutocratic and ungovernable, as Einstein identified, has become widespread, particularly in the USA (see Solty 2013, 68–71). Meanwhile, Fukuyama advances the thesis that »US democracy has little to teach China«, while a the peak of the global financial crisis Thomas L. Friedman, who is a real seismograph of the sentiments of the bourgeoisie, wished that the USA could be »China for one day« (Friedman 2009, 429–455)—that is, to be able to command the same power and state resources in order to be able to efficiently manage the crisis. These neoliberal mouthpieces of yore look at the Chinese one-party system almost with envy, a system which not least in the Global South is increasingly (fearfully) admired as a result of its developmental successes (Jacques 2009, 151–63; Kronauer 2019, 23–44), including bringing 770 million people out of poverty and into the waged middle classes (Ding 2019, 4).

China’s capacity for innovation has undermined the notion that liberal market capitalism is especially innovative. During the Asian financial crisis, the nations least affected were those that had most strongly opposed the »Washington Consensus« of market liberalization and the idea of the private sector being superior to the state sector. Moreover, China transformed itself from the low-wage workshop of the world to the USA and the West’s main high-tech rival not despite but because of its strong system of state interventionism (Ten Brink 2013, 113–92; Schmalz 2018,
This is clear in the Global South and has led to a crisis of neoliberal orthodoxy, even though it continues to dominate Western university economics departments. But even in the West the belief in the innovative strength of capitalist markets has abated, not least because influential publications such as The Entrepreneurial State by economist Mariana Mazzucato has demonstrated that essentially all of the innovation that has occurred under digital capitalism can be directly traced back to public (research) investment, which is then simply patented by Silicon Valley and then cannibalized by financial capital (Mazzucato 2013).

Capitalism finds itself today in a deep ideological crisis in this context. Although dissatisfaction with crisis capitalism is widespread for quite some time, there is no sense that things could be different. »The societies in which we live,« as Axel Honneth wrote two years ago, are »defined by an extremely irritating dichotomy that is difficult to explain«. On the one hand, »anxiety around the socio-economic situation, around economic relations and working conditions, has grown enormously in recent years«. Since the end of the Second World War, it is likely that there have »never been so many people simultaneously appalled by the social and political consequences unleashed worldwide by the capitalist market economy.« However, it seems that »this mass outrage lacks a guiding sense of direction, a feel for a conclusion to its critique, which means that this outrage remains curiously
mute and inwardly directed; it is as if this rampant anxiety lacks the ability to think beyond what currently exists and imagine a society beyond capitalism (…)« (Hon-neth, 2017, 15)

The global financial crisis and the climate crisis, however, have put the question of fundamental alternatives to present financialized neoliberal capitalism back on the agenda. Throughout the West, the political landscape is undergoing a process of fragmentation along stark ideological lines: the eroding (neo)liberal centre is being challenged by authoritarian nationalist, proto-fascist, and straight up-fascist forces from the right and neo-socialist and communist groups from the left. In the USA, for example, this polarisation is embodied in the way that the cross-party (neo)liberalism of Hillary Clinton, Jeb Bush, or Joe Biden has been challenged by authoritarian conservatism in the form of Trump, or neo-socialism in the form of Bernie Sanders. In essence, what we are seeing is the repolarization of the political called for in recent years by Chantal Mouffe (Mouffe 2005: 69–76), which Mouffe considered to be a necessary antidote against right-wing populism, and the emergence of a new left populism which Mouffe promotes as the alternative to right-wing populism after its ascent (Mouffe 2018).

Yet dissatisfaction with the current state of things is increasingly being articulated on the left using the language of »socialism«, currently enjoying increased currency in the »West«, particularly among the younger generations in countries most affected by the crisis. In the parliamentary elections in the United Kingdom in December 2019, 18-to-24-year-olds voted overwhelmingly in favour of Labour’s programme of (re-)socialization, so much so that the victorious Conservative Party would not have won a single seat had this age group been the only one voting. Meanwhile, in the USA, »democratic socialist« presidential candidate Bernie Sanders’s campaign is supported by a broad and primarily young mass movement, one whose demographic polls indicate has long preferred »socialism« to »capitalism« (Solty 2019c). In Germany, too, socialism is experiencing a concrete ideological renaissance in the form of new debates around property ownership: in summer 2019, the »Expropriate Deutsche Wohnen et al.!« campaign, with its goal of (re-)socializing large profit-oriented real-estate companies, alongside debates prompted by the SPD’s youth organization leader Kevin Kühnert, who created a controversy by calling for the socialization of BMW and other big corporations and by stating that no one should own homes beyond the one they are living in, led to a dramatic shift in the terms of debate around property ownership, and revealed the widespread popularity of socialist measures of this kind (Nuss 2019, 9–17). In the words of US playwright Tony Kushner, »history… crack[ed] wide open« (Kushner 1993, 112).
Against the backdrop of capitalism’s tendencies towards crisis, even Fukuyama and Jeffrey Sachs, the economist who orchestrated the shock privatisation of the former Soviet Union and carries responsibility for the »Russian Mortality Crisis« (1992–1994) with seven million »premature deaths« (see Azarova et al. 2017), expect—and explicitly welcome—a return to »socialism« in the future, at least in terms of a strong social-democratic redistributive welfare state (Sachs 2012; Fukuyama, 2018).

In short, we are today witnessing the end of the »end of history« and experiencing the end of the »end of grand narratives«. Through its descent into crisis, liberalism has brought about its antitheses: nationalism and fascism, but also the hopeful portent of socialism.

2 // THAT’S WHY!

The return of socialism isn’t a surprise. Capitalism today finds itself not only in its deepest crisis since the 1930s; what’s more, in the course of 250 years of industrialization, capitalism has brought the world to the brink of a crisis of civilization, one which threatens to signify the end of humanity. This was something that Perry Anderson anticipated in 1992, when he wrote: »Once the liberal paradigm (…) is applied, a future rehabilitation of socialism cannot be precluded (…)« (Anderson 1993, 169). The excesses of liberalism do not necessarily bring about the gravediggers of capitalism, but they compel society to defend itself against the destructive powers of liberalism and unleashed market forces (Polanyi 2002).

But liberalism has no answer to this major crisis of capitalism and its six dimensions. In contrast, it seems that the larger the crisis becomes, the narrower and less visionary the answers become. As Klaus Dörre points out: »In a period of deep societal transformation, it does not suffice to merely tamper with symptoms. Instead, it necessitates to defeat the sickness and correct systemic errors (…).« Because, as the British historian Eric Hobsbawm had warned us as early as 1994: »The alternative to a changed society is darkness (…)« (Hobsbawm 1996, 585).

**LIBERALISM’S LACK OF VISION IN THE FACE OF THE MULTIPLE CRISIS**

Yet, liberals in power react to the economic crisis by postponing it. Scrappage programs and rebates on electric cars, actions aimed at gaining competitive advantages by further exploiting workers stimulate car sales (for a detailed analysis of this in a US context, see Solty 2013, 15–71). The explicit goal here is market expansion, for example by increasing car exports to emerging economies and particularly to China, home to today’s largest middle class because of its aforementioned success story. The answer to the economic crisis is thus to deepen the ecological and climate catastrophe (Solty 2018a).

Meanwhile, reigning liberalism reacts to the crisis of social cohesion either with
tech optimism or not at all. Under capitalism, revolutions in technology, which—were they democratically controlled and not driven by capitalist interests—could unleash enormous emancipatory potential, freeing humans from physical drudgery or alienating work, instead befall humans almost like natural disasters (Dyer-Witheford, Kjosen and Steinhoff 2019; Solty 2019a). The precarization that turns the loss of a job into panicked fear of social exclusion and lays the foundation for the rise of right-wing populism (Butterwegge and Hentges 2008; Lühr 2010) is seen as inevitable. As a result, however, the social causes of (pre)fascism are once again widespread, with destructive effect. The anti-fascism of left-leaning liberal elites remains powerless and helpless as long as it does not tackle the social origins of (neo) fascism (Solty 2015).

With the crisis of social reproduction, reigning liberalism reacts with calls for individual responsibility: all over the burden of raising and caring for those not yet or no longer capable of work is increasingly being placed on families. In place of legally-enshrined pension rights, there is now (obligatory) private provision, even when wage and salary levels make it unaffordable, while they outsource the crisis of care onto cheaper care workers from foreign countries.

As for the crisis of representation and democracy, reigning liberalism reacts to it with more authoritarianism of its own: more surveillance, stricter security laws and expanded emergency powers, a further delegation of citizens’ sovereign rights to transnational forms of statehood that are not democratically accountable (such as the European Union, the European Fiscal Compact, and trade and investment agreements such as the TTIP, the TTP, CETA, and so on).

Reigning liberalism reacts to the crisis of world order and the rise of China with economic warfare supported by military action, plunging the world into a new global arms race. Crucial resources for the struggle against the economic, social, democratic and climate crises are instead used to build weapons that when exported destabilize the world and force people to flee war and violence, which gives impetus to extreme right-wing forces at home (see Solty 2016a, 44–54).

Finally, reigning liberalism reacts to the environmental and climate crisis with greenwashed sham alternatives such as individual e-mobility or the chimera of »green growth«. This occurs although history shows all emissions reductions resulting from technological innovation have not only been neutralized by the sheer need for expansion, but that the endless growth which capitalism depends on as its condition sine qua non has drastically increased the strain placed on carbon sinks and accelerated climate change across a finite planet more broadly. The reason for this is that capitalism’s problem is not merely one of the rate of growth, but—as David Harvey (2017,
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172–210) has argued by drawing on Marx’s »Capital, Volume 3«—also and especially one of the »mass of growth,« which doubles every quarter of a century.

Capitalism and real-existing liberalism, its ideological mask and self-consciousness, are thus pushing the world to the brink of civilizational catastrophe and perhaps even beyond. Some word it even more bluntly: Swiss social scientist Jean Ziegler is right when he says that »either we destroy capitalism now or it will destroy us« (Ziegler 2019). Calling the entire system into question can no longer be avoided; as British journalist George Monbiot says, »Dare to declare capitalism dead—before it takes us all down with it« (Monbiot, 2019). What comes across as overly sweeping and almost insipid in these injunctions is the realization that there are no compartmentalized answers to capitalism’s multiple crisis. We are forced to be as radical as reality demands; in the words of Erich Fried, »Whoever wants the world to remain as it is does not want it to remain at all« (Fried 1995, 87). The world order that CDU-starlet Friedrich Merz, in his critique of Greta Thunberg and Fridays For Future, seeks to defend on behalf of his employer BlackRock, the world’s largest capital investment management corporation, is in fact no order at all; it is chaos (Solty 2019d).

Einstein’s essay appeared in 1949. Seventy years later, we find ourselves in capitalism’s greatest crisis since the 1930s, a six-dimensional crisis that could spell the end of human life on earth if it continues unabated. The Nobel Prize winner wrote his essay after one of the world’s worst catastrophes, just as the socialist aspirations in Europe following the First World War—including the 1917 October Revolution—also followed in the wake of a terrible catastrophe, the »primal catastrophe« of the 20th century. The question we must now ask ourselves is: must such terrible catastrophes and their attendant world wars first occur before humanity comes to realize that fundamental alternatives to the status quo are required? Can we not begin discussing social, democratic, and environmental alternatives to the present situation before reaching a point of no return?

The goal of the following section is to make the case for a fundamentally different economic and social order, one capable of staving off the impending catastrophes. This will involve a consideration of alternatives to capitalism as it exists today, before the current tendencies towards de-democratization, barbarism, and fascism metabolize into real forms of barbarism and fascism, before the preparations for new world wars taking place as part of the global arms race develop into real world wars, and before the trend towards climate collapse culminates in a real climate apocalypse.

For lack of a better word, this alternative is still none other than socialism. Yet, because of the historic experiences of socialism, and because of the tremendous changes in and with global capitalism, »socialism« must be imbued with new life and new
substance. It must learn from its historic mistakes, and cannot be permitted to stop addressing the crimes that were committed in its name—in the same way that also liberalism and conservatism ought to come to terms with their own respective histories of misery and death (see Losurdo 2011). Finally, the socialism of tomorrow must also be conceived and discussed in a way that is relevant and up-to-date. And it will have to be devised, build, developed and improved in a collective effort of all people, because socialism, when it comes, will be democratic or not at all.

In this spirit, the present paper sees itself as an invitation to return to socialism and start thinking about it in totally new ways. What follows is not presented as an end, but rather as a starting point. It is an invitation to think systematically and collectively about what a better world would look like: socially just, economically stable, more democratic, more humane, with gender equality, peaceful within and between communities, and environmentally sustainable, while also warding off climate catastrophe.

3 // BUT HOW, EXACTLY?

Socialism is defined in different ways: does socialism entail a starkly delineated economic and social (re-)ordering? Or does socialism refer to the movement that strives beyond capitalism towards an alternative society? Both definitions exist (Fülberth 2010).

One thing is clear: socialism cannot be designed from scratch. In the history of political thought, intellectuals have time and again tried to design the »ideal state«, whether it be Thomas More’s »Utopia« (1516), Tommaso Campanella’s »City of the Sun« (1602), or Bacon’s »New Atlantis« (1627). At the turn of the 19th century, these were supplemented by the blueprints for alternative societies devised by early socialists such as Gracchus Babeuf, Charles Fourier, Henri de Saint-Simon, Pierre-Joseph Proudhon, and Robert Owen. Ultimately, these ideas mainly suffered due to the contrast between what should
be and what is, a distinguishing feature of the tradition of idealist thought. The revolutionary aspect of the ideas of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels was that they sought to identify the historical laws of motion and their counteracting causes (counter-tendencies) using the method of dialectical materialism and showed how socialism (and communism) develops out of the real movement of history. In doing so, according to Engels, their scientific socialism differentiated itself from the utopian socialism of their predecessors (Engels 1891). And this is also the specifically democratic nature of Marx and Engels’ socialism compared to its utopian variants (see Sunkara 2019, 46–7).

Socialism is on the cards when, during major capitalist crises, it is paradoxically this accumulation of great wealth—excess capital in need of being invested—that threatens to plunge capitalism into a state of barbarism.

According to Marx and Engels, capitalism creates the conditions for a socialist society through its »tendential« laws, such as the general law of capitalist competition and accumulation, as these tend to result in the increasing concentration and centralization of capital among fewer and fewer people (and later corporations and trusts). However, this tendency towards monopolization, the creation of ever-greater units of capital, lays the foundations, in their account, for communization, the transformation of these major corporations into communal property. It is not socialism, they emphasize, that expropriates the independent producers; the biggest motor of expropriation is in fact capitalism itself. In addition, Marx and Engels see it as capitalism’s historical mission to create the wealth that can serve the development of the potential for freedom latent in society: radical reductions in working hours, a plenitude of freedom with more time for that which makes us human, more time to meet friends, to learn to play an instrument or speak another second language, more time for active cultural production, more time for social life, and so on (see extensively Solty 2020 as well as Dath 2008, 81–94; Ringger 2011, 119–33 and Haug 2011). As they see it, socialism is on the cards when, during major capitalist crises, it is paradoxically this accumulation of great wealth—excess capital in need of being invested—that threatens to plunge capitalism into a state of barbarism. In such situations, the capitalist laws of motion are merely supposed to create the objective conditions for socialist transformation, however: preventing that capitalism’s forces of production turn into forces of destruction necessitates anti-capitalist action. Capitalism, they argue, will not collapse of its own accord, but
must instead be overcome by a movement comprising the wage-dependent working class (see Harvey 2010, 260); as it says in the Communist Manifesto, the «common ruin of the contending classes» is equally possible (Marx and Engels 1848, 462; Sweezy 2000).

…the realization that there are no compartmentalized answers to capitalism’s multiple crisis. We are forced to be as radical as reality demands.

Marx and Engels long assumed that socialism would first be realized in countries where capitalist development had proceeded to its furthest extent—England, the USA, or Germany. It was not until the end of their lives that they recognized that socialism would perhaps instead prevail on the peripheries of internationalized capitalism, in societies dependent on the wealthy centre and where scope for the kind of distribution of wealth that would satisfy the populace is narrower. Historically, socialist revolutions have succeeded in countries which have remained dependent on larger capitalist centres, were underdeveloped, and whose economies were still primarily rural-agrarian, such as Russia in 1917, China in 1949, and Cuba in 1959. These are places where the conditions for the realization of socialism were thought to be least conducive, in that industrialization—a prerequisite for their emancipation from imperialist exploitation from the capitalist centre—still needed to occur in these countries, under the worst of conditions and with much social suffering to come along with it (Kossok 2016). Lenin therefore argued that socialist revolutionary situations would in fact arise in places where the «imperialist chain» of dependency had its weakest link (Lenin 1915, 268). The fact that in January 2015 during the Euro crisis the socialist left would come to power in Greece of all places serves to further emphasize this (see Sablowski 2015). Lest this be taken as universal law, however, it is worth noting that in recent years capitalist centres such as the USA and the UK have also seen the possibility of governmental takeover by forces proposing radical and even somewhat socialist change (Panitch and Gindin 2018, 55–6).

Against this backdrop of real history in constant flux, it is crucial to recognize that socialism cannot simply be thought up out of nowhere. It was this insight that led Marx and Engels to view any attempt to sketch out socialist society in detail with skepticism. As in the past, those who today strive to position socialism as an alternative to capitalism do not get to choose the conditions under which such a transformation will occur.

For the reasons mentioned above, preconceived images of socialism were rare in the socialist labour movement based on the ideas of Marx and Engels. The concrete realization of socialism
would, as Marx and Engels themselves also put it, depend on the level of development, on internal and external relationships of (class) forces. »Socialism in one country«, as decreed by Stalin following the failure of socialist revolutions in the West after 1923, cannot, they thought, ultimately exist. Capitalist states would mobilize all available resources to bring about the downfall of socialism, just as in 1871 the ruling classes of France and Germany joined forces to crush the Paris Commune by military force, just as capitalist states after 1917 and then 1941 »crusaded« against the Soviet Union (see Mayer 1989), just as the USA and the capitalist West worldwide supported military coups and mass murder against democratically elected socialist governments and communist movements, from Iran in 1953 and Indonesia in 1965–1966 through to Chile in 1973, or sought to assassinate the leaders of socialist revolutions, as Fidel Castro in Cuba after 1959 or Thomas Sankara in Burkina Faso in 1987. The truth, therefore, is always concrete. The socialist movement acts in a concrete historical context and under conditions that is has not chosen.

**THE SYSTEM**

Nevertheless, the term socialism does also designate a clearly defined conception of a new ordering and configuration of the economy and society. By »socialism« we generally understand an economic and social structure that has socialized the private ownership of the means of production that existed under capitalism, meaning they are now held in common by the broader population.

As previously mentioned, the concept of socialization has enjoyed consistent popularity in Germany following periods of capitalist catastrophe. In today’s Federal Republic of Germany, the Basic Law is in force. The public property held by the GDR was privatized by the Treuhand government agency after 1990 (see Köhler 2011; Dahn 2019, 35–44; Kowalczuk 2019, 110–36); in joining the Federal Republic, the GDR was forced to accept its system of property ownership. A reunification founded on a new constitution did not take place in 1990. Thus, the German Basic Law, which was only ever intended to have remained valid until precisely such a »reunification«, was now applied to both of the formerly separate German states (Kowalczuk 2019, 65–82). It was with this Basic Law as premise that Marburg School constitutional law expert and political scientist Wolfgang Abendroth, in his debate with ex-Nazi and now leading liberal Ernst Forsthoff, author of the 1933 book »The Total State«, put forward his case for a constitutionally appropriate path towards socialism. The Basic Law, he argued, particularly article 15, allows for the transition to an alternative economic order based on public enterprise (Gemeinwirtschaft) (see Abendroth 1954; Forsthoff 1968). This interpretation is still powerful enough that the free-market Free
Democratic Party (FDP) was unsuccessful in its attempt to fend off the debate about »Expropriate Deutsche Wohnen et al.!« with an appeal to eliminating article 15. Still, simply because it would be legal and constitutional, this does not answer the question what a transition to a socialist economic order might look like?

The diverse range of interpretations of what socialism can be is no drawback, however. We find ourselves today at the beginning of socialism’s rebirth.

The obvious question, of course, is what people mean by socialism in the context of the idea’s current renaissance. The various conceptions of socialism currently floating around share a common critique of capitalism, but otherwise vary from one another greatly. For example, many Americans understand socialism to be the Scandinavian model of the welfare state, i.e. a highly redistributive system with large amounts of public investment, a strong union presence, free education and health insurance, and a strong social safety net with provisions for unemployment, the inability to work, and old age. In China, on the other hand, »Socialism with Chinese Characteristics« means a mixed economy in which the state retains control over interest and exchange rates, land remains in public ownership, and the state has a large stake in most companies, but that market principles are otherwise adhered to. Even critics here acknowledge the inarguable achievements in terms of development and the fight against poverty, but question how such market forces and levels of wealth inequality, now unleashed, can once again be brought under control (Cohen 2010, 65; Wemheuer 2019, 231−37).

The diverse range of interpretations of what socialism can be is no drawback, however. We find ourselves today at the beginning of socialism’s rebirth as an alternative to capitalism and at the beginning of the corresponding debate and reappraisal of socialist theory and socialist concepts. This includes the question of who does or should own property under socialism (Brie 1990). Which forms of property ownership make sense at which points in social development? How should we conceive of the relation between state-owned property, worker-managed companies (cooperatives), and private property? Are market structures necessary within a socialist economy? Or do technological advances, computerization, and big data allow for a centrally-planned economy on a scale that was inconceivable for the state-socialist countries of the 20th century? In essence, do we now have the technological means to solve the socialist calculation problem that Austrian School neoliberal economist Ludwig von Mises posed as an issue for the Soviet economy in the 1920s? Does the option of cybernetic planning beyond the market exist? The answers to these
questions may vary depending on nation and region. What is clear, however, is that a range of models will emerge that will be able and will have to cooperate with one another. The vital question to be answered today is whether we will be able to construct what Michael Brie calls with regards to China a common discursive space for such conversations about urgent questions of future and futuring which are founded on the recognition that various ways can lead to those goals.

**PRODUCTION UNDER SOCIALISM**

Whoever wants to discuss socialism today must resolve the issue of the reorganization of production first. Here exists a broad spectrum of conceptions of socialism that require re-evaluation. The list begins with the classic social-democratic ideas of socialism, which ultimately amount to »economic democracy«. Bernie Sanders’ understanding of socialism (see the relevant contribution in this brochure) essentially corresponds to this model, one based on a combination of reinvestment in employee funds that mirror those put forward by Swedish union economist Rudolf Meidner and union-based worker participation models such as those that were implemented in West Germany following the Second World War. These new Meidner funds are the most radical point at which Sanders seeks to go beyond capitalism. Meidner’s notion was that wage-dependent workers working in the private sector would receive shares in the company they were working for as a core part of their wage, the basic idea here being that they would, in time, become the company’s owners. In this scenario, pension funds are also managed by the unions. In time, the capitalist owners would become redundant. Hitherto capitalist private companies thus come under the control of self-organized workers’ committees. At the same time, however—and this is where the question of whether it would make sense resurfaces—the market would be preserved, as the cooperatively-run companies would still compete on the world market and be subject to its rules, for as long as it continued to exist.

Anyone who wants to discuss socialism today must firstly resolve the issue of the reorganization of production. Here exists a broad spectrum of conceptions of socialism.

Socialist frameworks that are more extensive than Sanders’ approach while also perhaps remaining complementary are those that take Rudolf Hilferding’s ideas and repurpose them to better suit the present moment. Hilferding was a political and economic theorist and social-democratic politician who, on behalf of the workers’ and soldiers’councils, put forward the concept of a democratization of society via a mixed economy«at the National Congress
of Councils in 1918. Hilferding’s belief was that society as a whole must obtain control over capital investment. To this end, it was necessary to identify »mature industries«, meaning those economic sectors whose continued possession by the private sector was causing particular damage to society. In his time, Hilferding believed that society would obtain control over investment by nationalizing the coal and steel industry. Society would allocate coal and steel, at prices not determined by the market, to industrial firms that would further process it, and in that way be able to control which investments would count as socially useful and which not. Ultimately, society would thereby direct its own further development via the state apparatus (Hilferding 1918).

In today’s world, Hilferding’s concept would need to be adapted to the conditions of transnational financial market capitalism and thus radically reconstructed. Another crucial discussion point would be how a democratic society would succeed in initiating the necessary investments required to effectively manage the climate crisis. In 2019, which economic sectors would be the »mature« ones? The steel and coal industry of yesteryear would today surely be the finance industry. During the crisis that began in 2007, the point at which the major banks were rescued with taxpayer money in order to avert total financial meltdown was surely a missed opportunity. What the state should have done was convert these banks—the »mature« companies—into publicly owned service providers in order to obtain control over the automotive and other manufacturing industries. Had this happened, the production of (highly profitable) SUVs and more importantly unsustainable individualized vehicles could have been halted and the automotive industry reshaped to focus on the development of environmentally friendly mobility solutions (Albo, Gindin and Panitch 2010, 109–14; Wright 2019, 77–78).

The »economic democracy« and »Hilferding 2.0« conceptions of socialism were formerly part of the classic ideological underpinning of social-democratic parties before their neoliberal shifts. Those that go beyond these are conceptions of socialism that draw upon newer ideas of democratic planning or cybernetic socialism.

Cybernetic socialism proceeds from the assumption that Ludwig von Mises’ critique of the Soviet economic model was plausibly correct. In his essay »Economic Calculation in the Socialist Commonwealth«, published in 1920, Mises’ had argued that a socialist economy could not be efficient, as an efficient mode of production was dependent on a large number of ways of bringing the factors of production—labour power, technology, etc.—together. For this reason, it would be unable to compete with the capitalist market economy and its presumably more efficient allocation of those factors (Mises 1981, 110–23).

In reality, the world does not function according to the mathematical and ahistor-
ical models proposed by the neoclassical orthodoxy. The real-existing human being does not behave like an atomized factor of production and simply does not, as neo-classical economics suggests, permanently leave his family, friends and homes behind in order to move to where there are job opportunities (Solty 2018), and it is likewise fanciful to reduce the environment to a commodity. Climate change may well be the biggest market failure in world history. People live in a concrete and real society and a delicate ecosystem. For the exact same reason, the capitalist market tends not towards equilibrium and »spontaneous order« (Hayek 1991, 83–85) but instead to its exact opposite: economic and regional imbalances, pervasive economic inequality and anarchic market chaos.

Despite this, today’s proponents of data-driven socialism concede that the socialist calculation problem was a real issue. Nowadays, they argue, the advent of computers means that it would however be possible to precisely and efficiently produce whichever consumer goods were democratically deemed necessary. Modern computing systems are, they say, capable of efficiently planning for the production of well over 100 million commodities. In short, the technological requirements and algorithms for the democratically planned production of societally useful and sustainable commodities essentially already exist (Cockshott and Cottrell 1993).

Contemporary discussions of socialism can thus be located within a discursive framework delineated by positions such as a Sandersesque economic democracy, a socialist market economy, a mixed economy, democratic planning, and data-driven socialism. Also worth considering, however, are the ultimate limits to socialist discussion that will persist as long as private ownership of the means of production is left undisturbed. Every new socialist discussion must grapple with the constraints and problematiques of these discourses.

THE FIVE CONSTRAINTS AND PROBLEMATIQUES OF CONTEMPORARY SOCIALIST DISCUSSION

The first constraint and problematique concerns redistribution and regulation. This constraint applies primarily to conceptions of socialism that understand »socialism« essentially along the lines of the Scandinavian model, i.e. as a left-wing social-democratic model. Under capitalist conditions where the means of production are privately owned, not only are the preconditions for the anarchy of the market« produced, but constraints on the extent to which the »right to the whole product of labour« (Menger 1891) can be organized also emerge. As long as the institution of private property is left undisturbed, a part of the value created by wage-dependent labour (surplus value) will continue to be appropriated by private actors. At the same time, these models brush up against the constraints set by private control of capital, which is able to evade social control.
(through the relative flexibility of capitals, for example). Conceptions of »socialism« that—like the one espoused by Bernie Sanders—rely heavily on redistributive measures such as taxes on the rich, national job guarantees, large-scale unionization and public investments as well as regulatory concepts such as protection against unfair dismissal at work, must also at some point raise the issue of how the structural power of capital, its mobility, can be overcome (see Solty 2019a and 2019f).

The second constraint and problematique is that of infinite capitalist growth on a finite planet. As radical as Sanders’ Meidneresque socialism may sound, it ultimately falters when it comes to the question of how to organize a post-growth economy. Even if large companies are managed by their workers, they are still subject to the competition enforced by the globalized capitalist market. Surplus value is no longer appropriated by private owners as profit, but in order to provide the members of the »cooperative« with a reasonable standard of living, such companies must still compete and grow in the (global) marketplace. Here discussions of socialism must also reckon with their third constraint and problematique: that cooperatives, in contrast to the beliefs of John Holloway (2002) and others, do not in fact pave the way for socialism, and are not a suitable strategy for gradually overthrowing capitalism. This is because capitalism has historically always existed in parallel with such non-capitalist forms of property ownership and has continually been able to re-absorb them into its territory, i.e. reintegrate them into the capitalist system (Röttger 2010; Novaes and Dagnino 2011).

The fourth constraint and problematique of socialist discussion concerns the issue of transnationalization. Marx and Engels identified the capitalist laws of accumulation and competition as being vehicles for socialism because they expedited the expropriation of smaller units of property by consolidating it in increasingly larger capitals. The artisan is superseded by the small business, and the small business is then superseded by the large corporation; the farmer is superseded by the agrocorp; the small shop proprietor is superseded by the department store, which is then superseded by the online shopping monopolies. In the same vein, anarchic competition between small property owners is superseded by the centralized planning present within capitalist oligopolies and monopolies. Ultimately, socialism also means democratizing the economy by converting this private planning into centralized, democratic planning.

In the second half of the 20th century capitalism went transnational. The supply chains embodied by transnational corporations now extend beyond national borders (Panitch and Gindin 2012). Despite this, capitalism remains organized along nation-state lines, and the forms of transnational statehood that exist, such as those found in the European Union, are extremely undemocratic and serve the
interests of large corporations much more than they act as instruments of democratic control and decision-making from below (see Apeldoorn 2000; Bieling 2006; Solty and Werner 2016: 280–84; Greenwood 2017). The central issue is thus how socialism can achieve its goals under these conditions: will a future socialism (have to) develop new forms of global statehood? Will transnational corporations need to be transferred into the hands of transnational worker-led management structures by means of Meidner funds or other means? Are existing concepts and practices of union organizing along the transnational supply chain perhaps the building blocks for a transnational socialism? And which elements of global statehood are necessary to control these internally democratized transnational cooperatives from an external position to ensure they benefit global society as a whole?

The fifth and final problematique lies in the natural monopolies that exist under digital capitalism and their concomitant market power. In contrast to Marxism, classic conceptions of institutional political economy (those put forward by John Stuart Mill, Max Weber, John M. Keynes, Kenneth Galbraith, Joseph Stiglitz, Paul Krugman) as well as those held by German ordo-liberalism, believed that the tendency towards monopolization could be managed through the dismantling of large monopolies. The answer provided by many economists and politicians occupying this ideological position regarding the extortion of nation states by »system relevant« banks was simply »break up the banks«. In reality, this meant that crises resulted in even more concentration and more of »too big to fail«, which led Marxist economists to propose the following maxim: »too big to fail = too big to be private« (Brenner 2009).

As a result of digitalization—the »fourth industrial revolution«—capitalist platforms have emerged which are very particular kinds of monopolies. These platforms function like natural monopolies and therefore present a specific challenge: if, for example, the purpose (from a consumer point of
view) of Amazon Marketplace, Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, or Google is to connect and network as many people as possible and ultimately all of earth’s inhabitants, then ultimately only one of these providers needs to exist. Bernie Sanders’ recommendation to break up these large platforms, or Jeremy Corbyn’s proposal to create a publicly-owned alternative to Facebook, are thus false alternatives that misunderstand the core problem, with the demand for the socialization of data centres being much more important (Morozov 2015; Morozov and Bria 2017). Ultimately, however, the issue of the socialization of these natural monopolies with globalizing tendencies is connected with the question of how they can be democratically controlled on a transnational level without the existence of a global state, as well as the extent to which such control by a global state could be made radically democratic to avoid the possibility of the global state misusing the data.

At the same time, any future discussion of socialism must also address how modes of living will need to change alongside modes of production; for example, which forms of property ownership (particularly in the context of housing) continue to be reasonable. The spectrum of the discussion in Germany seems to range from the model of (re-)communalizing major real estate companies (the »Expropriate Deutsche Wohnen et al.!« campaign), in which the state fulfils the role of providing affordable housing for all, to the suggestions

**FOOD—HOUSING—CARE**

21st century socialism will involve a reorganization of the means of production of not just industrial commodities but also food. Discussions need to be had around whether today’s transnationalized system of food production, which for example makes blueberries from Peru and raspberries from Morocco available in Germany in winter, makes sense on a social level, an issue which can only be briefly touched upon here. This discussion will need to be tied to the question of decentralizing agricultural economic cycles. In contrast to the problems caused by digital platforms, the disbanding of transnational agricultural corporations seems a much more meaningful solution in this context. In the Global South, particularly on the African continent, the issue of decentralization will almost certainly take place within the framework of a re-agriculturalization process (Banchirigah and Hilson 2010) and an at least temporary »de-linking« from the capitalist centres of the EU and the USA (Amin 1990; Bello 2005, 59–70).

At the same time, any future discussion of socialism must also address how modes of living will need to change alongside modes of production; for example, which forms of property ownership (particularly in the context of housing) continue to be reasonable. The spectrum of the discussion in Germany seems to range from the model of (re-)communalizing major real estate companies (the »Expropriate Deutsche Wohnen et al.!« campaign), in which the state fulfils the role of providing affordable housing for all, to the suggestions
put forward by Kevin Kühnert which fundamentally reject the idea that people should own more residential property than they need for their own private use, in turn rejecting the idea that people should be able to earn an income simply by renting residential property to others rather than working. At heart, Kühnert (2019) is arguing for the implementation of the Cuban model, where, following the revolution, ownership of residential property was essentially transferred by decree to those who inhabited it. Of course, a socialist approach to housing must decide how it wants to deal with the real spatial segregation along class lines that occurs under capitalism, and the resulting divergent development of areas designated for the rich and the poor and regions which have experienced prosperity and poverty respectively.

A further important issue to address is obviously that of social reproduction. The main question for society here seems to be whether it wishes to actually delineate reproductive and value-conserving labour into individually measurable tasks—shopping, cooking, washing, cleaning, child-raising, caring for the elderly, and so on—which are then correspondingly remunerated as socially-necessary tasks, or whether socialism should instead—as under a state socialist system—mean that the state should undertake this reproductive labour via public services (free childcare, free elder care, etc.), i.e. as a form of fundamental care and aspect of the »commons« made available for free to anyone who wishes to utilize it. The answer to the question as to which is more desirable seems quite obvious.

**BEING MOBILE—LOOKING, SEEING—BEING WARM—LEARNING—CREATING**

Human beings do not live from food, consumer goods, and housing alone. Other areas of social life pose similar questions to those mentioned above. In terms of digital communication, the necessity of open access to a strong telecommunications infrastructure is already apparent. What about mobility, however? The question here is which forms of mobility can replace individual car-based mobility and the pseudo-alternative presented by e-mobility. The simple answer is the construction and expansion of a free public transport network and the relocation of the transport of goods and people from the street to the railway track. An environmentally sustainable society is one that is eco-socialist and entails a scaling back of the automotive industry. The question which remains unanswered however is how society will respond to the capitalist production of space as in the case of suburbanization and de-urbanization, which, as things stand, can hardly be efficiently integrated into train and underground networks.

The supply of energy is the next key issue to be addressed. Thinking about this in an eco-socialist manner means contemplating how to expand storage
capacity for renewable energy sources but also figuring out how energy can be used in a more decentralized way. This may also be an area in which localized structures of communal self-management play a major role.

Ultimately, however, thinking beyond the provision of basic necessities primarily means expanding access to education and culture. The desegregation of class society presents socialism with complicated challenges, particularly with respect to education. New forms of schooling shaped by the needs of local communities may be the right approach, but the way that different areas of cities have experienced divergent levels of development will mean that socialist politicians will have to overcome significant challenges in order to be able to implement socialist educational policies. What is clear, however, is that education and culture under socialism will need to be anchored to a robust understanding of »the commons«, i.e. the conception of education as a free public good and guaranteed funding for vibrant forms of cultural production that serve to stimulate human creativity.

It is needless to say that there exist well-funded answers to all these issues sketched above, although the list of unanswered questions may be equally long for obvious reasons. However, as Bertolt Brecht once had his Herr Keuner character articulate: »I have noticed (...) that we put many people off our teaching because we have an answer to everything. Could we not, in the interests of propaganda, draw up a list of questions that appear to us completely unsolved?« (Brecht 2001, 18).

THE MOVEMENT

One truth is irrefutable: A socialist ordering of the world as has been briefly sketched above can only come into existence through a movement that strives to bring about this change in the name of »socialism«. A post-capitalist economy and order will not come about by seemingly neutral technological advances such as digitalization and without agency, as this has been suggested by Paul Mason (2018; see the critique in Fischbach 2017). The central question concerning socialism in the 21st century is its actors. Which ones have an objective interest in the realization of such an order and are therefore the natural standard-bearers of the socialist movement? Which alliances will lead to a socialist politics? What is the concrete political strategy of socialist parties? What is the relationship between a new form of class politics and a savvy form of left-wing populism (Solty, 2019b)? What are the stages and concrete battlegrounds of building socialism in the 21st century? Is there a direct path forward to ecological socialism? Or, given the current weakness of union-based class organization in the »West«, is such a transition only conceivable via the route and detour of a »Green New Deal«? What are the basic approaches
to transitioning into a post-capitalist society, is it going to be a dismantling, a rebuilding or a taming of capitalism or a combination thereof, which can lead to an erosion of capitalism, as suggested by Erik Olin Wright (2019, 40–61)? Is the old revolution/reform dichotomy the correct way to address the issue of post-capitalism or are we better advised to think through a transformation which shifts international relationships of forces and constantly creates new room for manoeuvring (Panitch and Gindin 2018, 95)? What is the timeframe for a socialist alternative to global capitalism and its six-dimensional crisis? How will the socialist movement deal with the fact that socialism is deeply necessary but that the path towards it is long—too long, given the few remaining years available to humanity to bring climate change under control? In the words of socialist political scientist Leo Panitch, what would be required to bring about socialism in a world that resembles that of Blade Runner?

The answers to the questions of a socialist movement and of the shape a socialist future might take can only be provided by socialists themselves. The crisis of civilization that capitalism in its current form has led us towards means that their number will only increase. Socialism is an objective necessity—whether it is realized will depend on its subjects, will depend on the propertyless who have an objective interest in it, will depend on all of us.

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History teaches us nothing, so said Social Democratic Party (SPD) leader Andrea Nahles, to justify discontinuing the SPD’s Historical Commission. Long ago, Rosa Luxemburg took the opposite position: »history is the only true teacher« (GW 4: 480). Perhaps history really doesn’t teach us how we should act immediately in our current situation. This is true in general, and also in very specific circumstances. Were we not convinced that the tradition of critical fascist analysis would give us the concepts to resist developments in capitalist society that tend towards an erosion of democracy, towards authoritarian and exceptional state forms which drastically worsen the prospects of emancipation? Didn’t we believe that, equipped with this knowledge, with all our »historical interrogations«, we would be better able to resist and defeat right-wing forces? It appears not to be the case. But history teaches us something much more fundamental, namely that our present moment is the present of a history. In this present, the struggles and the missed opportunities of the past are condensed in a special way.

It is not a question of »what might have been?«, but of concrete decisions, of victories and defeats, of real alternatives. It also teaches us that once decisions have been made, they actually result in long-term developments.

**OUR PRESENT IS EMBEDDED IN A SPECIFIC HISTORY**

The different attempts made to realize socialism, many of which proved to be wrong or senseless, which failed or were defeated, are all a part of our present’s history. Because of these previous attempts, many things associated with the name socialism are now considered historically obsolete, out-dated, or discredited. There are several reasons why this is the case. Socialism was associated with practices that contradicted and discredited socialism’s emancipatory ambitions. In many cases it is doubtful that those who acted and spoke in the name of socialist objectives were pursuing anything more than the selfish interests of individual functionaries. Yet it would be a false consolation to think that an idea that was good in itself was merely abused.
Indeed, the ideas and concepts of socialism are the subject of discussion and conflict. Understood in this way, there is no definition of socialism which is valid a priori; rather there are a range of suggestions for how to define it. In many cases, the term encompassed particular social groups who (for a time rightly) believed that they embodied the general will, but who did not understand that the concept of socialism in whose name they were acting was a compromise that enjoyed the support of many people only due to the circumstances prevailing at that moment. They wanted to cling to this moment and this claim to universality, and enforce stability. Unable to adapt to the changes in the social constellation, they denounced different ways of life, perspectives, or contradictions as deviations, or pathologized their critics. In this way, socialism was not an open, free social organization of collective life, but rather remained limited to certain social groups and their life situations (certain groups of industrial workers, special modes of production, for example large industrial factories in urban regions, and related forms of work organization), which claimed to be universal.

According to this claim, socialism is the only social form through which contradictions are consciously lived and worked out. This is why Karl Korsch was able to say that socialist society needs to be more skilled at processing contradictions, or in other words, that socialism is actually more complex than the capitalist form of social organization. This is because it no longer denies the contradictions and consigns them to anonymous social processes, such as the conflict between consumers and producers over products and product quantities, over working hours or shares in the overall productive output, or over ecological consequences. In this context, Marx’s unique contribution to the socialist tradition was to take the objective existence of contradictions seriously, to articulate and analyse them, but without moralizing, sugar-coating, or erasing them through the state’s claims to universality, or to suppress them by administrative means. If there are differences and contradictions between the claims to universality and the various social groups, their interests, and needs, then there is a need for forms which can mediate contradictions and tensions between the universal and the particular. Democracy is the process through which this happens. It is a regulated process in which individuals debate about what can be considered universal in a specific situation. Negotiations about universal interests impact the direction in which society as a whole develops. This can involve all aspects of society, including its

...that socialist society needs to be more skilled at processing contradictions, or in other words, that socialism is actually more complex than the capitalist form of social organization.
products, its work processes, educational and qualification processes, forms of housing and town planning, nutrition, and gendered and familial divisions of labour. Whether due to a lack of effort or other reasons, state socialisms failed to democratically regulate these processes of reconciling universal interests with the diverse interests or particular groups. Although the socialist states saw themselves as democratic people’s republics, hardly any democratic processes of mediating between different interest groups were initiated. Though they often held onto the political form of parliaments and parties, the internal logic of these forms was blocked in order to maintain the communist or socialist parties’ monopoly on power, so that universal interests were not defined through open discussion, but rather by the most powerful working-class party. The workers did not make decisions on matters that affected them. There were no experiments with other forms of democratic coordination (such as those discussed throughout the history of the socialist movement) which would have enabled the workers and the members of society to participate in defining claims to universality.

The bourgeois class can allow its internal differences to find expression by distributing power among several competing parties and political institutions. The left has so far contributed little to the development of a conception of the limitation of political power, or what
Michel Foucault called a socialist art of government or governmentality. This is certainly one aspect that has contributed to its defeat. For when it comes to gathering together many different groups and interests under one concept of universality, then it is also necessary that all those involved are able to remove themselves from this alliance without being subjected to negative consequences. They must be able to anticipate this and expect to be able to present a modified, perhaps even different concept of the universal.

NO CAPITALISM WITHOUT SOCIALISM
It is a very curious thing when people say that socialism has been discredited. Socialism occupies one of the deepest layers of modern society itself. A modern society based on capitalist methods of production would not exist without socialism. This society cannot be separated into an objective reality on the one side and different ideologies and political tendencies on the other, which would include not only liberalism and conservatism but also socialism, which, after it has destroyed its reputation, can then simply be cast aside. Even if there may have been socialisms before modern socialism—just as there was class rule and the appropriation of the surplus product by those who did not produce it—it was only constituted in modern capitalist society through a series of disputes. It is an aspect of the real movement of this society, not a value or norm that would might be added externally to a given reality. Socialism is the name given to those internal tendencies in capitalist society that are necessary to solve the large problems of social development.

Socialism is the real movement of this society, not a value or norm that would might be added externally to a given reality.

These large problems are historically new in this form, because humanity only comes to observe and understand itself as a collective actor under capitalism. People can analyse the exploitation of nature and the disturbance of the Earth’s metabolism. For example, they know all about fish numbers, oil reserves, the extent of rainforests or whale populations. They are able to understand that economic crises that lead to unemployment, hunger, or migration are not due to unexpected natural processes like a bad harvest, but are caused by humanity itself; they understand that inequality is the result of disparities in education and skills. Humanity is aware of genocides, the global trafficking of human beings, the approximate number of slaves and sexual violence. Each of these major problems calls for concrete solutions: not merely for incremental improvements here and there, but for the problems in each case individually to be »surpassed«. We need to reach a point where we no longer need to search for solutions, because the problems...
have simply become superfluous, since they ultimately no longer occur.

NO LIBERATION WITHOUT OVERCOMING WAGE LABOUR

Why lump all these efforts together under one single name, the name of »socialism«? For historical reasons—so as not to obstruct access to all the experiences and attempts made at emancipation; so as not to remain naive in the face of all the decisions that have led to the present and which have all contributed to making life better and worse at the same time. But also because socialism refers to a specific moment in modern history. It is the keystone of the whole that holds everything together, since it is constitutively at the beginning of the constellation of the modern, capitalist way of life: wage labour, which makes it possible to produce the historically unique form of social wealth in a specific way—money, commodities, means of production, company shares, assets, real estate. The wage form is the social form which makes it possible to reproduce all other forms of exploitation and domination. It is impossible to change capitalist relations without also changing these forms; in other words, without overcoming wage labour, which refers to the fact that human labour is a commodity that must be moulded for the labour market and must strive to find someone who has a need for this commodity at market prices. This entails all the risks for individuals, including being left without work and income, earning too little, or ruining our own ability to work and being unable to actually enjoy our lives.

The socialist project bears responsibility and must be held accountable for what is tried and what fails in its name. The same does not apply to capitalism.

If socialism appears to be discredited today, then we must count this as a defeat. In light of this, the question arises as to why anyone is happy that this is the case. Because the failure of socialism means the failure of the project of the Enlightenment itself. Understood in this way, it is a matter of people finding the courage to free themselves from their self-inflicted immaturity, that is, from conditions that they create through their own actions and that confront them again and again with the same problems at ever higher levels. Everything progresses except the whole is how Adorno describes this circumstance. In fact, there is something malicious to criticisms of socialism, since they often misjudge socialism’s historical significance. One of socialism’s decisive characteristics is its claim to rationality. The contradictions that permeate society can be openly expressed and, by consciously addressing them, can be avoided, overcome, or transformed into differences and otherness. On the basis of this claim to rationality, all mistakes, all
contradictions, all dysfunctions that arise during a transformation of the way of life of a society can be attributed to socialism. Yet this transformation is confronted with extreme forms of nonsynchronism: with regards to people’s level of knowledge and education, their needs, regional developments, the state of production and services, ecological destruction, as well as the production of new, rational cycles of production and consumption. The temporal horizon of socialist transformation is more expansive than that of capitalist processes: this applies both to the past and to the distant future. The socialist project bears responsibility and must be held accountable for what is tried and what fails in its name. The same does not apply to capitalism. Admittedly, social criticism (particularly that of a left-wing and socialist stripe) attempts to attribute many of our society’s problems to capitalism. But these efforts struggle to gain traction; and this is not because there are a host intellectuals fighting against such an attribution, who work to prevent the formation of such an »empty signifier« in which violence, wars, and genocides, the destruction of human lives, exploitation, ecological catastrophes, the sexist and racist denigration of human beings is symbolically condensed into the ultimate, morally debased antagonist. Rather the defenders of capitalism point to the complexity of our society, which makes it difficult to attribute these social evils to any one cause. Nobody seems responsible for the melting of the glaciers and polar ice caps, or if they are, we all are. When it comes to explaining the causes, everything seems to dissolve into a plethora of details: fossil fuels and related industries, agriculture, the automobile industry, container ships, and cruise liners. It all seems fragmented, unplanned, random, uncoordinated—the trans-intentional result of many different chains of action for which there is no primary cause. Anyone who tries to identify causes and protagonists, however, is portrayed as lacking nuance or even influenced by conspiracy theories. But the processes are internally interlinked, coordinated, complement each other, and form a constellation. Yet the capitalist reproduction process appears to be an anonymous systemic process for which everyone and no one, and perhaps even the majority—the subalterns—bear responsibility.

In the socialist tradition, Marx managed to address this perspective most seriously. Despite the fact that via liberal ideas of equality and freedom, of autonomy and the will to justice, a moral criticism of owners of capital is quite plausible and had often been proposed, Marx emphasized that it was mistaken to attempt to morally reproach individual entrepreneurs, capital owners, or politicians. For it is precisely the immorality of social processes that provides the impetus for demanding a transformation of the overall context that is consciously shaped by all. With his remarks, Marx was also able to make it clear that anonymity is not
so anonymous after all, since different degrees of freedom already exist in bourgeois, capitalist society. The bourgeois class is far more capable of determining capitalist relations, of maintaining itself as a social group amidst these relations which it is always reshaping, and of maintaining and changing the relations in its favour than is possible for people who do not possess capital and do not have access to bourgeois consensus-building events such as the World Economic Forum, who are not able to determine public opinion through their media and their cultural industry, who are not included in political decision-making processes, but who are above all objects of administration and useful instruments for the enrichment of fewer and fewer. It is a characteristic of developed modern domination that the wealth of the rich and the power of the powerful appear to be the incidental result of the implementation of practical necessities that supposedly serve the good of all. Only complex conceptual abstractions and statistical studies shed light on the systematic relationships.

FAILURE: ONE MOMENT IN A PROCESS OF CHANGE

Is it even possible for socialism to be defeated and to fail? In her final text, written after the January uprising in 1919 and shortly before her assassination, Rosa Luxemburg answers this question in the negative. The whole path of socialism will be littered with defeats, writes Luxemburg (GS 4: 536f). It is necessary to reflect further on this claim. Strangely enough, for Luxemburg it is not a tragic circumstance, where an unrelenting logic necessarily leads to a hopeless situation. The course of history is driven by its negative side. Defeat is everything that does not contribute to a change in conditions in the sense of a change in the mode of production. Accordingly, victory is by no means the triumphant victory in a battle, as is sometimes imagined, but the process of implementing a free organization of cooperation, the elements of which are always already present. In this respect, a historical failure is always a moment in an ongoing evolution of understanding and of shaping social relations. This enables the freedom of others, an increase in individualization, where the free development of each person is enabled by the freedom of all, thus creating a dynamic of a continual evolution of freedom, rather than the kind of zero-sum game of freedom that liberalism imagines, under which the freedom of one person can only come at the expense of other people. Such a socialist idea of freedom is only conceivable on the basis of cooperation. For only in cooperation—that is, under conditions of a sophisticated division of labour—can individuals achieve more and greater things than would ever be possible by themselves alone.

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2019 I SHALL BE

Rosa Luxemburg is one of the iconic faces of the socialist movement. Her unique way of combining theory and practice, analysis and transformation, strategy and active intervention in her life is what the LuXemburg Magazine aspires to, as the mouthpiece of a left-wing project for society. We follow her firm conviction that our society can and must change—and her optimism that a future of radical emancipation is possible, even in the face of political defeats: I was, I am, I SHALL BE!

Lutz Brangsch, Michael Brie, Mario Candeias, Drucilla Cornell, Alex Demirović, Gal Hertz, Miriam Pieschke, Tove Soiland, Ingar Solty, Uwe Sonnenberg, Jörn Schütrumpf

Juni 2019

2018 BREAKING FEMINISM

Recent years have seen a global wave of feminist protests. The reason comes through new challenges for feminist politics to effectively organize against the anti-feminist backlash and to take a clear stand against right-wing authoritarianism as well as neoliberalism. A New Feminist Class Politics can be an important strategy in addressing the intersecting bundle of domination and inequality.

Liz Mason-Deese, Tithi Bhattachatya, Gerd Wiegel, Barbara Fried, Weronika Grzebalska, Eszter Kováts, Andrea Peto, Alex Wischnewski, Song, Atlanta Ina Beyer

September 2018

2017 NEW CLASS POLITICS

The concept of new class politics may help forming a «connecting antagonism». We pose the questions: How can various parts of the class be connected? How can we read precarious labor in traditionally female vocations as a question of both gender relations and class relations? And how can racism be recognized as a form through which one part of the class is pitted against others?

Mario Candeias, Alex Demirović, Barbara Fried, Bernd Rixinger, Bernd Röttger, Anne Steckner, Cerem Turkmen, Markusd Wissen, Volker Woltersdorff

September 2017
With the exception of the articles by Bernie Sanders and Ingar Solty this brochure is a compilation of contributions from the 3/2019 SOCIALISM FOR FUTURE issue of the LuXemburg Magazine.

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