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GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES OR THE RIGHT TO HAVE RIGHTS

THE IDEA OF «GLOBAL SOCIAL RIGHTS» (GSR)

The concept of GSR intends to give an idea of the conditions needed for everyone to lead a life in dignity. Inherent to this is the «right to have rights» (Hannah Arendt). Yet capitalism is characteristically profit-oriented, and therefore incorporates rivalry, competition and commodification. This precludes the aim of a life in solidarity and justice, which every individual should be entitled to in order to enable them to want to, and to be able to contribute to society with their own personal abilities. What conditions does capitalism impose on people by way of the sociability that it has created, and what would be the structure of a sociability that takes unconditional GSR as its starting point instead of, as does capitalism, goods for money or service for return or calculating input and output?
The concept of GSR seeks to offer a perspective that enables the long-maintained crisis of a capitalist society of paid labour to be transformed into a society which replaces the principles of capital usability with the aim of achieving the greatest possible satisfaction for the individual.
This must go beyond defending the Keynesian welfare state – and in the end the state itself. Based on the Fordist model of accumulation, the welfare state was linked to the mass production of consumer goods, enabling full employment for a limited period of time. From a left point of view, taking leave of a nation state based on paid labour would not be regrettable for a number of reasons: the nation state was

1. an authoritarian state based on forms of bureaucratic control, such as the exclusion of non-usable parts of society;
2. patriarchal, as it was bound up with so-called «normal working conditions», male sole breadwinner with bourgeois nuclear family structures
3. thus dependent on the sexual division of labour; linked to many women being reduced to unpaid reproductive work;
4. built on the exploitation and exclusion of the global South and in disregard of the conditions needed for a healthy environment, due to the societies of the north.

The Fordist welfare state served to expand and stabilise mass consumption; that is, to channel the desire for consumption without end, resulting in environmental devastation and human desires being trimmed to meet capitalist requirements. Its bureaucratic and exclusionary social policy provided the material basis for efforts of social integration required to secure social peace.
Disturbances that might threaten the system were avoided by cleverly integrating the representatives of the interests of workers' movements into the state, which was done with the greatest success in Germany or West Germany.
This meant that the welfare state's regulation of the relations between wage labour and capital remained extraordinarily successful in maintaining the conditions needed for capitalist exploitation, but only for as long as economic growth worked as a condition of social policy. However, this also means that the Keynesian welfare state is dependent on successful capitalist accumulation, which per se determines its ambivalent character. On the one hand, it is a product of social struggles; on the other, it is determined by strategies to protect economic and political power. The welfare state is structurally dependent on economic growth and capitalist profitability. When the accumulation of capital is caught up in a fundamental crisis, the material basis of the welfare state is threatened. The welfare state's dependence on capitalism's tendency towards crises eventually becomes apparent during the crisis, with its slowing growth rates and growing unemployment figures. And with it, the success of social inclusion is depleted. This results not only in the exclusion of all those who have dropped out of the process of production, their fate even serves to force those with a job into conditions that are devoid of any social compromise.
Thus, it is becoming increasingly necessary to oppose the neoliberal «truth» that there is no alternative to neoliberal reorganisation, and the strategy of isolation, far from any form of sociability based on solidarity, which culminates in individualising all aspects of life and the commodification of all common property, even the right to live and life itself. However, resistance and alternatives are not enabled by funding

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proposals alone, but need a shift in the social balance of power. The best alternative ideas cannot be implemented without a powerful social movement. Nevertheless, the starting point is a debate about the actual ideas of transformation, after all, this is about guaranteeing everyone a dignified social life, regardless of income, employment, social status, gender or nationality.
However, alternatives must take the accomplished level of globalisation as their starting point. The actual transnationalisation of capital and the internationalised division of labour in society mean that social re-regulation at the level of the nation state would cause a relapse to the self-interests of the nation state, which is worth fighting against.
The idea of GSR seeks to respond to the fundamental crisis of capitalist working society, as all other capitalist crises. The explosion of society's productivity and the resulting development in wealth not only eliminates the necessity, but also the actual possibility of upholding the general compulsion to work. Within ruling politics, this fact is compensated by a system of repressive measures, which force those affected into increasingly pointless forms of activity. The emancipatory potential of this development is thereby completely destroyed.
To account for this potential, it is necessary to step back from the dominant and exclusive concept of paid work. Full employment based on lifelong full-time paid work seems neither desirable nor will it continue to be feasible with the current level of productivity.
A new understanding of the concept of work would have to be broader and more plural. It would above all have to dismiss its obsession with classic industrial labour and should include all people's activity that is productive for other people. The division between manual and mental work, and productive and reproductive work should be abolished. Any definition of useful and necessary activities for society must incorporate all forms of reproductive work, private work and voluntary work. Work, taken as an individual activity, is still the most important means of socialisation. Any form of hierarchical division of labour by society remains a principal source of domination and inequality.
This should be thoroughly considered in any proposal which envisages a politically alternative idea of the necessary and useful activities for society. The development of non-market based, yet socially useful and less alienating activities will only become possible when an adequate basic income is no longer linked to wage labour, and when it is granted to every individual unconditionally as a legal right by the provision of a reliable social infrastructure.
If social movements that strive for emancipation are to be mobilised, then a political vision is urgently needed, a project of global social equality that goes beyond merely defending the traditional welfare state.
At the basis of a possible transformation are the ambivalent dynamics of globalisation itself: on the one hand, a growth of global and national impoverishment and an increase in the deprivation of rights and exclusion; on the other, unbelievable material wealth. This wealth should be the material basis for an alternative form of sociability.
An essential prerequisite to breaking down the boundaries of civil rights towards «world citizenship» (Hardt / Negri) with GSR is that every person, wherever they happen to be, has the rights that are valid there, meaning that they have the right to have rights in any place where they choose to be. Here, the essential difference to the idea of human rights must be emphasised. GSR does not assume that human rights should be granted or guaranteed by the state, but rather that they are appropriated. Right always has a dual character: on the one hand it must create reliable justice for all and each other, on the other it is an instrument of rule, the use of which is settled by the balance of power. This contradiction determines the sad fate of human rights. The actually existing balance of power h inders their implementation as well as preventing institutions from being established that enforce and guarantee human rights. People therefore lack the place and possibility to demand that their rights be implemented.
Hence the demand for GSR: acquiring legitimately recognised rights when they are denied. However, this can only be enforced collectively, which would then transfer power relations.
To achieve global justice, all considerations should seek to compensate for the gap in wealth between the north and south. Care should be taken to ensure that this always begins with the specific, individual living conditions. Taking human rights as the standard, which might be widely accepted, but when their enforcement is not in the interest of capitalist domination, then global guidelines would be available that could create possible local courses of action.

THE OPPOSITE OF USING PEOPLE FOR PROFIT MAXIMISATION IS UNCONDITIONAL TREATMENT

Abolishing the idea of usability for capital interests requires an unconditional type of thinking as embraced by human rights. According to this, the individual should not have to subordinate his or her own personal interests to capital interests or society, but society must aim towards creating the conditions needed for every individual to live a life in inherent dignity.
Social co-existence should be such that every individual is given the greatest possible chance to develop and unfold!
Ultimately, this is the only way for social co-existence to lead to a maximum of productivity for society as well as for the individual.
The principle of quid pro quo is incompatible with the demand for unconditionality. Human rights depend on the idea that rights are not tied to duties. Unconditionality demands a fundamentally different way of life and lifestyle, in particular freedom from repression. The idea of the need for repressive measures seems unalterable to capitalist thinking, because it is inherent to it.
In capitalism having rights is only due to those whose behaviour complies with prescribed conditions, they are thereby earned. The capitalist system has the fundamentally normative attitude that basic rights, and thus human rights, are at least partly to be withdrawn in the absence of good behaviour.
The idea of unconditionality excludes punishment however, as punishment rests on the idea of complying with conditions.
Underlying the idea of unconditionality is a view that assumes that humans are social, cooperative beings; any form of destructiveness is a response to social causes that force constraints on or tailor individuals, resulting in unbearable frustration.
The following theses on GSR and its dependence on the relations of production serve to summarise the objectives of global social rights:

1. The idea GSR unites a variety of left currents under the banner of calling for unconditional basic rights, which enable a participatory, more equal and democratic society that gives individuals the right to develop fully, thereby enabling them to consider themselves a self-determined part of society.
   During the post-war era, awareness eventually became established that human rights, which by way of nationalisation had become civil rights, were the unconditional rights of all people.
   Human rights as an idea, but with no real possibility of being implemented, increasingly became a concrete demand. However, their implementation fails under the actual economic circumstances that stand in the way of a system of rights in the sense of unconditional rights for all.
2. The fight for the right to have rights could become a common focal point of concrete struggles of political players and human rights activists, migrants, workers and trade unions, NGOs and movements.
3. A comprehensive and all inclusive debate must be initiated or further developed on the aims of left intervention. Ideas must be developed about what characterises «another» world, a «better» life, in order for this to become feasible for all. At the same time, left intervention must be effective by way of concrete action. In order to fight there must above all be a clear idea of what it is that is worth fighting for. No commitment can be developed without utopian surplus, without ideas of alternative social conditions, without an idea of where the struggle will lead. Global thinking would have to be challenged in order to arrive at strategies of local action.
4. The following 5 points are essential to developing a type of society that is emancipatory and exists in solidarity:

I. BREAKING AWAY FROM THE CULT OF ECONOMIC GROWTH, RADICAL ECOLOGY

Capitalism is based on the principle of competition; it is unrestrained as it is geared solely towards profit maximisation, which requires continuous growth at the expense of man and nature, thereby curtailing the living conditions of all. Even though profit is produced by society, it is privately appropriated. This necessity for economic growth both disguises the environmental consequences of growth while even destroying life possibilities, as well as masking the fact that nature can in principle not be dominated and can only be exploited with negative consequences for us all, because people are simply part of a balanced system which in this way they are destroying.

II. REDISTRIBUTING GLOBAL WEALTH, TOWARDS GLOBAL EQUALITY

The extremely unequal distribution of opportunities in the North-South divide is a result of capitalist exploitation and domination. This is reflected in the access to the world market, the debt problem, access to resources such as oil and water, and particularly in the consumption of energy and resources, as well as pollution.

It is therefore absolutely essential to implement the following points – cultural, political and economic self-determination – food sovereignty, concentrating on the needs of the population rather than only export, – democratic participation in world trade, and creating transparency in these structures – debt relief – a fair distribution of and free access to resources in order to put an end to the marginalisation of the South.

III. SOCIAL INFRASTRUCTURE AND PUBLIC SERVICES

Social infrastructure, which should be available free of charge on the one hand includes all that is necessary to sustain human existence, such as housing, energy, water supply; on the other hand, infrastructure also refers to what is needed for self-fulfilment such as mobility, education, science and culture. This would have to be created locally and collectively. Of primary importance in the education sector are expanding and protecting public facilities such as schools, universities, adult education centres and libraries.

In such a concept, education is conceived as a social realm for the appropriation of all cultural techniques, and the participation of all in society and politics. These cultural practices include not only technical skills and cognitive abilities but also social skills and intercultural knowledge. Here it is important to promote all forms of self-provision of education and democratise the large educational institutions by introducing and increasing true administrative autonomy, which must also apply to the infrastructure as a whole.

Ultimately, the focus should be on mobilising and providing social and infrastructural prerequisites for a <good life> for everyone, and no longer preserving the social conditions needed for the utilisation of capital. By creating a social infrastructure, conditions could be established that lead to the development of new forms of socialisation and self-determined activities beyond traditional wage labour. With new forms of work and activity, a basis would be created for ways of life that favour emancipatory and participatory action.

Extending social infrastructures together with public services and an individual unconditional and poverty free basic income would also bring with it socially fair redistribution. After all, wealth would have been acquired socially. The private appropriation of wealth by a few can in no way be fair.

In order to be able to do justice to the concept of human rights, an individual, unconditional and poverty free social basic income would be absolutely essential to guarantee everyone access to necessary products, initially in the form of remaining commodified products. This would mean that the circumstances needed for social participation would also be warranted. All this could only become possible by separating income from employment.

Emancipation, creativity and participation, contributing personal skills in a self-determined way in order to create radical democratic opportunities of shaping a different society – this can only be achieved if a fundamentally different concept of activity is established, which is far beyond constraint and repression.

As numerous studies prove, people tend towards social cooperation provided that they are not squeezed into the straitjacket of paid labour.

The function of money demands critical reflection. An unconditional basic income in the form of money is not conceivable as a human right. The human right of unconditional involvement and participation is only connected to money as long as the social distribution of goods depends on money. Once infrastructure can be freely used, the significance of money would decrease. Commodity form would be suppressed in favour of «practical value».

Unconditional basic services include guaranteed health care and nursing care. Health care and nursing care should seek

to implement an extensive concept of health, which includes an independent life free of pain and with the maximum possible mental well-being – and not the aim of reinstating paid work.

IV. UNCONDITIONAL FREEDOM OF MOVEMENT

Migration and flight have many causes. We can however assume that people do not flee out of free choice, but as a result of intolerable living conditions. These increasingly unbearable living conditions in the south are the result of global power relations, manifested in the control, marginalisation and the dictates of the northern World. Were the north to take on the responsibility for the living conditions of the victims of its politics and fight the effects, then there would be fewer refugees as people would prefer to stay in their social and cultural environment. Regardless of this, the concept of human rights would never permit abandoning people to inhuman and degrading conditions and excluding them as undesirable or illegal. Migrants and refugees do not only have a right to life, but a right to an existentially secure life, as does everyone everywhere. Again, we are dealing with a basic right that no one can deny another person. The right to freedom of movement is also a human right, which must be implemented by an appropriate migration and refugee policy.

V. RADICAL DEMOCRATISATION OF SOCIETY, ECONOMY AND POLITICS, TO GUARANTEE EMANCIPATORY PARTICIPATION

The call for an emancipatory society is contrary to (pure) representative democracy, because it reduces participation to regulation on a regular basis of those who then implement political decisions as representatives, while the profit oriented economic sector, which defines the relations of production and thereby determines the political situation, is beyond any democratic influence.

Decisions about which products are socially necessary and useful and how they are to be produced are controlled by the market (which needs the goods, resulting in an opaque mix of value and utilisation value, even reducing human labour to a commodity), rather than a democratic, social decision that aims as far as possible to meet individual requirements while respecting the needs of the environment.

The demand for democratic and united social relations cannot be satisfied by calling for <democratic control>. Democratic control is a paradox: while democracy aims to create democratic power in order to influence, control aims at submission and domination. Those striving for emancipatory relations cannot possibly claim control. Relations need to be democratised; that is, achieving the ability to influence and the power to shape events, and this requires transparent processes. Controlling behaviour must be avoided on principle. Even the «right» people being in control does not improve the matter. All forms of control are hierarchical, heteronomous ways of achieving state power, and to quote Poulantzas, a «radical transformation» of the state is also needed. It is a matter of supporting resistance to the dense power relations within the state in order to pave the way to a caring social system, which guarantees pluralism and the greatest possible political and social freedom for absolutely everyone.

The existing social relations must be changed as they constantly reproduce dominant, hierarchical power relations. People therefore have to change themselves, their state of consciousness and behaviour as well as their value systems. This is a very lengthy process, which will not be possible by initiating power structures. Under capitalism, people are forced to sell their labour under the criteria of the labour market in order to be able to gain the financial interest from this heteronomy to enable their survival. Having to earn a living in itself demands a kind of servitude. Employment compromises the idea of work: who still links the idea of productive activity with employment, which is what everyone would strive for were they not caught up in alienating coercive circumstances? Labour is valued worldwide, millions of people are forced into paid employment, at the same time, the reserve industrial army grows. Yet increasingly, other areas of socially necessary wok remain «undone». Important reproductive activities are subjected to the logic of exploitation with destructive consequences for reproduction and well-being. Humans, as social beings, depend on recognition for their activities. Why should it not be possible to completely break down the coercive link between income and productive activity?

Only the actual process itself will show how capitalist relations of production can finally be overcome. To begin with, open spaces for exploration and action are needed in order to find the necessary productive circumstances that are oriented towards the needs of humankind and the environment. Only when employment conditions that create satisfaction have been found for everyone, will living conditions that are not based on separation be possible. In order to achieve this, great freedom and space is needed for horizontal, grassroots structures to be rehearsed.

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Important website on GSR: www.global-social-rechte.de
Currently slightly out of date, but soon to be revised:
www.bewegungsdiskurs.de

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