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THE SECOND GREAT TRANSFORMATION AND THE LEFT

My point of departure is the question as to the historical locus of the present multidimensional crisis. The difficulty in answering it is that the historical significance of a situation is as a rule difficult to grasp for those living within it.

All the greater is the responsibility of intellectuals to address such a question. My thesis is: the most recent societal crisis, which has not at all ended with the abatement of the financial crisis and the overcoming of the world economic crisis, could be seen as the beginning of a fundamental watershed in global development. Following on "The Great Transformation", which Karl Polanyi analysed in his work with that title, nothing less than a Second Great Transformation is now entering onto the historical agenda, a transformation which will revolutionise all spheres of societal life on earth.

The First Great Transformation encompassed the transition from feudalism, from the small-scale production of goods, the subsistence economy and other pre-capitalist forms, to the capitalist mode of the production of commodities. As a result of this process, which took more than 300 years (Kossok, 1988: 42), profit came to dominate the economy and society, and the economy was no longer integrated into society; rather society was subordinated

to the economy. Nature has been incorporated into the process of the valorisation of capital as if it were limitlessly available, and as if the ecological balance could be arbitrarily and without consequence sacrificed to capitalist growth.

THE DISCOURSE ON TRANSFORMATION, 1989 AND 2009

The neo-liberal capitalism of the past decades has driven this development to its climax, and has resulted in the present crisis. This has constituted a historical crossroads situation. All societal forces feel constrained to seek answers to the question of which way they want to go in future. The interpretation of a crisis situation itself sets the course for the manner and direction to be taken in dealing with it. Gaining sovereignty over that interpretation will mean being able to determine first that reactions to the crisis will be in one's own interest. Loss of that sovereignty will put one well on the way to losing the battle for the thereafter.

Twenty years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, it seems reasonable to look back to the autumn of 1989 and the ensuing years, from that point of view. The upheavals of history always include an incalculable stock of cognition and experience, be they obtained through victories

or defeats. They can be made to come alive for the tasks of the present. Walter Benjamin wrote: "The living at any given time see themselves as being at the noon of history. They are called upon to prepare a meal for the past. The historian is the herald who bids the bygone to dine." (Benjamin, 1984: 155).

The challenges of the autumn of '89 were interpreted by the power elites of the West as a task of "catch-up modernisation" (Zapf 1992) or "catch-up revolution" (Habermas, 1990) in East Germany and eastern Europe. Wolf Lepenies' findings were: "The political class of old West Germany, with few exceptions, turned unification and its results into a festival of self-affirmation." (Lepenies, 1992: 31). They could count on the desire of the majority of East Germans to gain rapid access to the liberties and the prosperity which the West German model promised. The process of German unification was implemented almost totally as an expansion of the structures of the old West Germany into East Germany, as a transfer of institutions, elites and resources from the West to the East.

The mainstream of the social sciences accompanied the transition from state socialism to capitalism with a huge wave of research on transformation, generously funded by outside sources. With the goal of compiling an international state of the art, Professor Wolfgang Merkel of the Berlin Social Science Research Centre in 1999, in his book *Systemtransformation. Eine Einführung in die Theorie und Empirie der Transformationsforschung* [System transformation: An introduction to the theoretical and empirical aspects of transformation research], summed up what he sees as the substance of transformation processes in our era as being "the transition from one system of order to a fundamentally different system. This includes the transition from dictatorships to democracies, from planned and fiat economies to market economies, and the change from closed to open societies." (Merkel, 1999: 15). Yet the perspective of a transformation from representative to participatory democracies, from a profit-oriented market economy to a mixed economy based on solidarity with a strong social property component and a socio-

ecological framework limiting the market, from open societies whose openness is in fact to a large extent a fiction due to the social exclusion of large parts of the earth's population, to truly open societies with socially equal participation by all of earth's citizens in the most elementary conditions of a self-determined life – all these remain beyond the thought horizon of the established scientific community. The property, command and power relationships of the OECD world have not been called into question. Ulrich Beck made clear what was meant by the transformation concept of the ruling elites: "Market economy – and no back-talk!"

This was based on a constricted view of the actual historical challenges pertaining at the end of the twentieth century. State socialism had failed because of the deficits of its basic structures. Its overthrow was long and urgently overdue. However, since the seventies, capitalism, which had until then been regulated by the welfare state, was also on an ever more conflict-prone path of neo-liberalism. Radical high-tech changes and globalisation had brought forth increases in wealth, with previously undreamed-of opportunities, along with very great dangers for human civilisation. Since the military coup in Chile in 1973, the implementation of the market-radical economic theory of Milton Friedman was practised there. The dismantling of the welfare state was well underway, particularly in the USA and in Great Britain, but had already made progress in Germany, too, before getting a decisive push in the form of Chancellor Gerhard Schröder's Agenda 2010. The report *The Limits to Growth* by the Club of Rome had long since spectacularly pointed to the endangerment of the natural existence conditions of humankind by profit-oriented growth. For the developing countries, the eighties were a lost decade.

For that reason, the concept of "dual modernisation" was developed at the Institute for Interdisciplinary Civilisation Research of the Humboldt University of Berlin, which had emerged from the reform-critical project

“Modern Socialism”¹ (Klein 1990; Klein 1991): a transformation process in the West, after two decades of neoliberal development, to a just society of solidarity; and a transformation in the East, designed to acquire the evolutionary potentials of modern bourgeois societies, while carrying its own experiences into a pan-European transformation process.

Of course this transformation strategy contradicted the real relationship of forces. But the question is, in view of today’s challenges for anticipatory thinking, whether this fact makes it legitimate for responsibly thinking people, especially intellectuals, to trade in reality-referenced, future-oriented ideas for the acclamation accruing to politics which ignores the really big questions of our time.

Max Weber wrote of such conflicts: “For the individual Of course, a constantly recurring problem is whether he must give up hope of the feasibility of his practical results, in view of his awareness of an obvious development trend which makes the implementation of what he strives for ... seem so improbable that his labours, assessed in terms of their chances of success, must appear as sterile, quixotic behaviour.” (Weber 1988: 513). In such cases, Weber considered the possibility that people would tend to surrender their ideals under such pressure, and concluded – in terms relevant to the present – that, “In Germany, one seems constrained to adorn this with the label ‘*Realpolitik*’. At all events, it is not logical for representatives ... of a science, of all things, to feel the need to do so by constituting itself as a round of applause for the respective ‘development trend’ (ibid). The specific function of science seems to me just the opposite: To see that which, in conventional terms, is natural, as a problem.” (ibid: 502). Thus cheered up by Weber, let us turn towards left concepts for a transformational society (Klein, 2002).

The crowding out of alternatives in the West in 1989 and thereafter favoured an increasingly market-radical development of capitalism and an unfolding of financial-market capitalism to the point that it led to the recent crisis of the financial system and of the global economy. Together with the mounting damage to the biosphere, especially the danger to climate stability and the reduction of biodiversity, with continued poverty and hunger, an acute food crises, and million-fold deaths in the developing countries from illnesses which are “actually” already treatable, with wars and with the erosion of democracy in many regions of the world where it had been newly established, a societal crisis has emerged which involves our entire civilisation.

The *Frankfurter Allgemeine* of 22 Oct. 2008 wrote regarding this crisis: “The situation was so desperate that confidence in the self-healing powers of the market alone would very probably have led to a catastrophe.” Then German Finance Minister Peer Steinbrück summarised the feeling in the inner circles of power: “We were all looking into the abyss” (*Der Spiegel*, 29 Sep. 2008).

In view of the crisis, the European left presented a multitude of demands to rein in the financial markets, to protect the citizens from having the social effects of the crisis dumped on them, and for the consolidation of the economy by future-oriented investment programmes in education, health, infrastructure, and the environment. However, neither in Germany nor in other countries has the left responded to the publicly discussed crisis of neo-liberalism by calling for an alternative societal project. It has not been able to introduce the contours of a just, future-oriented society into the public discourse and search for answers to the crisis – as if a left societal alternative could be reduced to the sum of single demands and projects. At a time when the capitalist regulatory system has been deeply shaken, the power elites delegitimised, and the inconsistency and incompetence of the prevailing political system made openly apparent, left-radical *Realpolitik* ought to have been able to make use of this loss of legitimacy of the prevailing political system and to transport the

¹ The Institute was encouraged by Jürgen Habermas, Cornelius Castoriades, Günter Gauss and others of his guests, to implement its autonomous development concept, was positively assessed by Jürgen Kocker – and, a year and a half later, was dissolved as incompatible with the academic structures of the old Federal Republic. (Brie, Michael/Klein, Dieter, 1992: 235 ff.)

inevitability of an emancipatory alternative into the public consciousness – without however in the least dispensing with practical measures and reforms in the immediate interest of those blamelessly affected by the crisis. But the left has yet to formulate any such fundamental answer to date, or at least it has failed to bring it into the public discourse in any noticeable way. In Europe, it has since the second half of the nineties been acting from a position of weakness. But the time has come to declare to the rulers: Your capitalistically determined transformation is coming to an end; the coming transformation will be an emancipatory, social, ecological and feminist one, the substance of which will, in the long term, mean overcoming capitalism in favour of a just and sustainable society based on solidarity! Its protagonists will have to address both the failure of state socialism and the limits of capitalism. It may bear many names. The modern left will call it “democratic socialism”.

There are many objections to such clear statements. For many, the concept socialism appears discredited by the practice of state socialism. Others fear that it will be misunderstood as a mere utopia, irrelevant to immediate concerns and tasks. Yet others are afraid that programmatic debates about consistent left identities could splinter the left still further. For them, the most important thing is a hitherto unknown readiness for cooperation and communication between the various tendencies and protagonists of the left. Susann George’s demand to “think big”, especially in the crisis, is all too easy to ignore, in the face of struggles to ward off the worst effects of that crisis.

FIVE SCENARIOS OF POSSIBLE FUTURES

In 1989, the German and European left were not able to provide a transformation perspective which could also have applied to the West. In the present crossroads constellation, it should definitely learn the lessons from that – for contrary scenarios of possible futures are apparent. For the next ten years or more, the elements of different societal projects will exist next to or in opposition to one another, until

the struggles between them are decided for the next phase (Institute for Social Analysis, 1/2009). Five development paths can be ascertained:

SCENARIO I:

A neo-liberal “carrying on as before”. We will not describe it here in any detail. From the experience of the past three decades, we all know what such “carrying on” would mean (Candeias, 2009; Klein, 2008).

SCENARIO II:

A mix of neo-liberal basic tendencies and state intervention to the rescue. The result of this mix could be the paradox of a neo-liberal, state-interventionist capitalism and an unstable temporary stability. Half-hearted steps towards regulation of the international financial system and addressing climate change, together with the unbroken power of a finance capital which is now concentrated more strongly than before the acute crisis, are an indication of this. After all, the power elites have, with their emergency parachutes for the banks, their reflationary programmes, and emergency social protective measures, prevented an even deeper crisis. The probability of the realisation of this Scenario II, which is closely related to Scenario I, appears great.

SCENARIO III:

Post-neo-liberal capitalism. Under this scenario, the state and civil society interventions would push forward a Green New Deal more consistently than under Scenario II. It could be connected to a “Public New Deal”, i.e. a counter-movement to neo-liberal privatisation, for the expansion of the public sector – public goods, public support of basic livelihood and infrastructure, public ownership and public spaces – tied to certain elements of the present reflationary programmes, and partially oriented towards Scandinavian experience. The failure of the neo-liberal regulatory path to solve the greatest challenges of our century moves this scenario into the realm of possibility. The weakness of the left would rather tend to negate the probability of this development path in the foreseeable future. But in this sce-

nario too, capitalist property, control and power relations would continually restrict the unfolding of any new societal logic. At best, the scenario would oscillate between the possibility of an opening for further-reaching transformation processes, and a relapse into Scenario II – or even Scenario I.

SCENARIO IV:

De-civilised capitalism. Less probable than Scenarios I and II, yet not impossible would be an escalation of unsolved problems, and the loss of a capacity of governmentality by the elites – that is, rule with the aid of the self-government and self-adaptation of individuals – so that the most conservative ruling factions could respond to future major crises with authoritarian regimes, violence, militarisation and right-wing extremism.

However, it is currently becoming apparent that a modified adherence to neo-liberal capitalism with the aid of state intervention, with very limited socio-political supports, and with green tendencies is gaining in preference amongst the power elites in many OECD countries. However, in the media-determined formation of public opinion, a new phenomenon is overlaying the continued dominance of profit which determines *Realpolitik*. It consists of the cultural reaction of the more farsighted amongst the rulers, the socially conscious bourgeoisie and the critical educated elites (Neugebauer, 2007; Brie, 2007: 13 pp.) to the shock of the crisis. The still dominant adherence to neo-liberal thinking is now being joined, with the growing support of the media, by a swelling current of more or less diffuse pronouncements in favour of a better, more just, more humane world, for an environmental turn-around, and for a world of cooperation and solidarity. A bourgeois “spirit of saving the earth” is wafting through the media (*Der Spiegel*, no. 30/2007).

This is an expression of a wide variety of interests, motivations, strategies, intellectual tendencies and individual positions. After the defeats suffered by economic liberalism, tendencies toward a revival of an ethical liberalism of responsibility are emerging, and combining with the rise of growing environmental aware-

ness. As a reaction to the imperial, arrogant policies of the Bush administration, Barack Obama’s ideas of global cooperation and communication are gaining in importance. Bourgeois humanism is challenged by acute mega-dangers, and is mixing with – weakened – social-democratic reformism, with the search for new, particularly green, areas of capital accumulation, and with the mobilisation of capital’s characteristic ability to incorporate movements and tendencies from below, and to integrate them into its power mechanism.

There are plenty of indications that the overall result of these various approaches to a global renaissance of the “responsibility principle” of Hans Jonas could rather constitute a greater adaptability on the part of the power elites. But this new trend in the intellectual-political arena could harbour opportunities for transformational activity within the context of capitalism, and perhaps beyond that as well. The result could depend to a large degree on the development of the relationship of forces between the ruling classes and a block for a sustainable society of solidarity presently only visible in its beginnings, from the differentiation between the factions of the ruling elites themselves, and, last but not least, from the pressure of left counter-power upon them.

The left should feel alerted by the intensive struggles which have already broken out over the paths to take following the latest crisis, and by the threat of “carrying on as before” at the highest levels. The extremely ambivalent new discourse about responsibility, which largely declines to address issues of property and power, and disseminates an aura of non-committalism between a hopeful new beginning and the existing power structure in a new guise, also challenges the left to throw its glove into the arena of intellectual-political struggles for hegemony. It is called upon to engage in radical *Realpolitik*. This includes the further concrete development of its offered project in all key policy areas, work on them in initiatives, movements, parliaments, administrations, businesses and governments, and the building of alliances to improve the situation of the citizens through their own efforts. However, left radical *Realpolitik* also includes

designs for an alternative societal project, the ideas of which would provide direction and a goal to the entire range of single political offers. The challenge to the international left in the presently still open crossroads situation is the practical and theoretical conceptual work on a fifth scenario, on its outline for a just society:

SCENARIO V:

Emancipatory transformation – to be outlined in the following sections:

THE SECOND GREAT TRANSFORMATION: THE CONTENTS

At first glance, the concept “emancipatory transformation” may appear to be nothing more than a clumsy paraphrase for a just society of solidarity, or for democratic socialism. And indeed, the desired contents of this Second Great Transformation could be described in these or similar terms. But it makes considerable sense to understand a just society, or democratic socialism, as a process of transformation, as opposed to possibly seeing it merely as a sequence of reforms in the social-democratic tradition, or as a result of a revolution, as in the communist version.

FIRST,

a second great transformation would encompass a revolutionary change of societal conditions – between people, and between their classes and social groups: a society of individual freedom in which all could participate in the conditions of a self-determined life in social security and solidarity – that is the basic idea of democratic socialism. That is the guiding concept not only for the future society, but for the transformational process, which will start in the midst of bourgeois society, and will lead beyond it.

Individual freedom – precisely this term means the ubiquitous desire of the individual to determine his or her own life. “In the western world, there is hardly a more widespread desire than that to lead one’s own life. Anyone today who travels around in France, Finland,

Poland, Switzerland, Britain, Germany, Hungary, the USA or Canada, and asks what really moves people, for what they strive, for what they struggle, what they would not put up with having taken away from them, the answer could be money, a job, power, love, God, etc., but increasingly, too, it is the promise of one’s own life:... With only slight exaggeration, one could say: the daily struggle for one’s own life has become the collective experience of the western world.” (Beck, 1997: 9).

Socially equal access to all goods and conditions of life which constitute the prerequisite for such freedom – precisely this corresponds to the concepts of justice of large parts of the population, but is impossible due to the profit dominated mechanism of the market. Meaningful work for a living wage, education and culture, high-quality health care and social security systems, democratic participation in social decisions and environmental justice in a peaceful world – these are the conditions for the free development of personality. Socially equal access to these basic goods for all is the basis of individual freedom. These goods can therefore be called “freedom goods”. And always, such justice in all instances, also means gender justice.

Solidarity is the condition for the struggle for social equality; it is the prerequisite for global cooperation as a central idea for the solution to the problems of humankind in the twenty-first century (Bahr, 2008: 264). Yet the neo-liberal unchaining of worldwide market competition, and the fight for survival of all against all, stands in sharp contrast to this.

Worldwide peace is the dream of humankind. In Iraq, in Afghanistan, and in many other countries, it is daily fading away, yet it remains the most elementary condition of life.

SECONDLY,

sustainability through socio-ecological reconstruction is part of the substance of the upcoming alternative transformation, i.e. a revolution in the relationship between society and nature. This is the second great basic process of a future transformation, together with a revolution of justice in the relations between

people. More exactly, the change of the societal means of production and of life must be so carried out in such a way that it includes a transition to a new kind of behaviour of society towards nature. In future, societal conditions must always be understood as societal-natural conditions.

This will require a fundamental expansion of the left's programmatic structure, and a new centrality of environmental policy as a central axis of left politics. This also applies to leftist parties. In this area which involves survival, the German LEFT PARTY has yet to take up the strong challenge of the Greens within the German party spectrum. However, it does have a strategic and conceptual opportunity to do so. The Greens see the Green New Deal, which is their goal, as green capitalism. The market and the profit mechanism are to bring about sustainable development and create jobs oriented towards green technologies. The opportunity for the LEFT party is, unlike the Greens, to push for the changes in the conditions of property, control and distribution which will be necessary for socio-ecological reconstruction, to question the dominance of profit, and to avoid an overestimation of market-compatible instruments such as the total pricing and certification of nature, while certainly applying market instruments for politically set, democratically developed goals and standards, in structural policy, and with stipulations and bans, and to consistently work for social justice as the condition for ecological structural change. Green democratic socialism is a true alternative, to be imagined as a social and at the same time an ecological process of transformation.

A central problem of a socio-ecological transformation, which cannot be treated here in any detail, since it is beyond the scope of this paper and also because it has not been addressed sufficiently to date, is the necessary abandonment of the hitherto prevailing growth model in the industrialised countries, and the transition to sustainable development (Binswanger, 2006; Bischoff et al., 2006; Falkinger, 1986; Reuter, 2000; Zinn, 2002; Zinn, 2008). Prevailing politics, which corresponds to the logic of capital, but also the concept of

green capitalism, depend on a renewal of growth as a decisive means for solving problems. The left, especially the trade unions, have throughout their history always seen economic growth as the best possible condition for the struggle for the redistribution of wealth in their favour. State socialism was to defeat capitalism through higher growth. But growth, which in its capitalist guise has produced a level of wealth never before known, has become an existential threat of our natural conditions of life.

Growth is destroying the biosphere. By 2050, the consumption of fossil energy resources and other important raw materials will have to be reduced at least to 20 per cent of the level of 1990. Even given annual zero growth, this would require a fivefold increase in the productivity or efficiency of materials. At one per cent economic growth, such an increase would require an eightfold rise in material productivity, a two per cent growth level, a thirteen-fold increase, a 2.5 per cent level, a seventeen-fold increase, and the three per cent growth rate which McKinsey has set as the target for Germany, a twenty-two-percent increase. If, in view of climate change proceeding at a faster pace than had been assumed until recently, a reduction in the consumption of fossil energy resources and other basic resources to 10 per cent in the industrial countries were to become indispensable, a thirty-four-fold increase in material efficiency by 2050 would be needed (Witt 1998; Rosa Luxemburg Foundation [ed.] 2000: 124). This however seems impossible, despite all innovations in environmental engineering. Growth eats up the relief provided by improvements in resource efficiency, unless the rate of increase in efficiency is considerably higher than the rate of economic growth – the so-called rebound effect. But improvement in material productivity is not endlessly possible, nor at any speed. There is an absolute limit to the decoupling of economic growth from resource consumption. Therefore, the Wuppertal Institute for Climate, Environment and Energy concludes: "A society which wants to become future-capable will have to address the possibility that it will itself, and certainly its future

generations, have to get by with less economic growth – and ultimately with none at all.” (Wuppertal Institute, 2008: p. 112). An important aspect of the crossroads situation at the beginning of the twenty-first century is that of paths leading to destruction of the biosphere by adherence to economic growth, or to sustainable development in the industrial countries without economic growth.

No less important than an enormous push for the development of efficiency technologies will be a transition to sustainable development, which will require a drastic change in our ways of life. The material consumption of the better-off strata will drop quantitatively in favour of higher quality of life for all through more and better education and culture, reduction in working hours and sensible use of leisure time, and human relations based on solidarity.

Material restrictions for the majority of the population can be kept in limits by redistribution at the expense of the rich and the super-rich, provided this can be achieved in the intense distribution struggles to be expected. Given a continuation of the present weakness of the wage-earning strata, the present tendencies toward growth stagnation will, to a great degree, be at their expense.

The depth of the cuts for consumers can also – again, provided the appropriate struggles are waged – be greatly limited by ensuring that losses in wealth and forms of economic growth which for most people presently mean loss of prosperity, can be overcome. These include heavy losses in already created wealth through wars, environmental destruction and diseases, but also the fact that wealth is produced and moved in forms which for most people mean a deduction from what they really need, such as investments of billions in financial products and advertising, arms production, the turnover of hundreds of billions in the area of organised professional crime, petty crime and corruption, and losses due to the normal course of things in our throw-away society (Klein, 2006).

A future sustainable society of solidarity in the industrial countries will open up environmental space for the emerging and developing coun-

tries on a new development path beyond the growth society, and thus at the same time provide them with an alternative so as not to have to follow in the footsteps of the West, at least not to the bitter end.

This transition from traditional growth to sustainable development will mean very deep cuts in the way of life of each of us, it will mean breaks with values and everyday life patterns which have been internalised for centuries, it will demand cultural breaks, and time which is actually no longer available. This transition will lend democratic socialism a character which the mothers and fathers of socialist visions could not yet suspect, and which must first be discovered.

The profit and market mechanisms cannot produce any unity of freedom and equality. They produce the opposite of solidarity, destroying the natural conditions for the reproduction of society. The failure of the market will therefore have to be answered by a central positioning of the public sphere in a Second Great Transformation. Only thus can the millennial tasks of the twenty-first century become solvable: the overcoming of wars, hunger and misery in the world, of illiteracy and status-based education, of deficiency diseases, and of unjust access to environmental space and societal decision-making. This means:

THIRD:

In the transformation to a future-oriented society, the public sphere - public goods, public support of livelihood, public ownership, public and publicly funded employment, public spaces and participation in the public decision-making process – will become the *conditio sine qua non* for individual freedom. It will become the medium of solidarity, because it will be able to provide fair access to the elementary conditions of life, and to such freedom goods as education, health and mobility. The public sphere will become the support of the individual against a future of uncertainty and exclusion. Ultimately, the public sphere includes the protection of global public goods: the stability of the biosphere and particularly climate stability, of peace and of human secu-

rity against poverty, hunger, and treatable disease.

The left project of a transformation to a just society therefore requires the recovery, strengthening and formation of the public sphere as a bracket between the individuals in society, between the I and the We. Whoever wants individual self-determination, must want the expansion and formation of the public sphere. The neo-liberal project is the individualisation of everyone against everyone. The project of the left is the individuality of everyone through participation in the public sphere by all. The politics of privatisation, supported by all Bundestag parties other than the LEFT PARTY, excludes a central position for the public sphere in their programmatic and political practice.

Both the first-rate significance of the provision of freedom goods for all, and especially the urgent expansion of public livelihood support indicate that emancipatory alternatives involve profound socio-ecological structural upheavals in society: for example, changes in relative shares of general provisions for reproduction, such as education, health, child care, care for the elderly and the health-impaired, culture, social security systems, and mobility – and, in individual consumption, between the production sector and the service sector; a radical shift away from fossil fuels to solar power; armaments conversion; a transition to ecologically compatible ways of life; and a restructuring of the relationship between domestic and export markets, and between domestic consumption and solidarity support for developing countries. Therefore, the plan of the LEFT PARTY, put forward in their Bundestag election platform for 2009, to implement a public investment programme of €100 billion annually as a financial foundation for societal structural policy, and a €100 million “future fund” for socio-ecological projects, would be an important instrument for public regulation, in place of market radicalism.

FOURTH:

The intellectual-political work of the left for an emancipatory transformation process has its point of reference not in the mere intellectual

design of a Brave New World. To be a leftist means being there when projects for a better life are being built. That means working to mobilise alternative actors by participating oneself in their commitment, and networking them into movements, alliances and coalitions powerful enough to effect change in the struggle for a better future. Invocations of a better world alone will not suffice. Certainly, the effective presentation in the media of pictures of a just society of solidarity can contribute to changing people’s thinking and their behaviour. If however such pictures suggest, as the Global Scenario Group, close to the Stockholm Environment Institute, has done in their study *Great Transition* (Global Scenario Group, 2003: 14), that the necessary change is already in full swing and that those but recently responsible for the crises are already busy mutating into earth-rescuers, they then also contain tendencies which serve to block the necessary transformation processes.

An intermediate summing up of the contents of a Second Great Transformation can be formulated as follows: The substance of the First Great Transformation described by Karl Polanyi was the transition from feudalism to the capitalist commodity society, and the full development of bourgeois capitalist societies. The substance of a Second Great Transformation will be the transition to a society which overcomes the basic structural deficits of capitalism, and is therefore oriented towards justice, solidarity and sustainability. Here, such a society has been called “democratic socialism”. It is described as a composite of:

- > freedom through equality and solidarity
- > socio-ecological reconstruction
- > defence and expansion of the public sphere
- > mobilisation of protagonists for a just society.

At the end of the seventies, Jean François Lyotard had proclaimed “the end of the great stories” as a feature of postmodernism. That, however, did not prevent neo-liberalism from continuing its story of the solution to the world’s problems through the unleashing of

markets. Today, leftist alternatives are cropping up with a many-voiced concert of points of view and approaches. The challenge to the socialist left is to pick up its own great story of socialism, which was thoroughly discredited by the reality of state socialism, and continue it as the story of a democratic and libertarian socialism rebuilt from the ground up, in such a way that links to other progressive stories and alliances and those who embody them, can be established. This is all the more urgent inasmuch as it is not at all certain that the neo-liberal story will not survive the present crisis. However, it is certainly possible – many say probable – that it will lose its hegemonic position as an ideology.

The story of the left answers the simple question: “What do people need so as to be able to live in a self-determined manner?” (The LEFT/PDS, 2005: ff.). This question determines the consistent theme running through the programmatic structure of the left. This question could become a permanent fixture in the public appearance of the left – along with the answers to it.

Democratic socialism – provided it is able, as it has yet to demonstrate, to actually convey the multilayered emancipatory content of this concept! – certainly has what it takes to conceptually formulate a conclusive societal alternative to capitalism and to become the content of a Second Great Transformation.

THE SECOND GREAT TRANSFORMATION: A PROCESS

The different society of the future has in the history of the left been foreseen either as a process of growing into the new society by way of reforms, as one of the moralisation and the humanisation of capitalism, or as the result of a great act of revolution. An understanding of democratic socialism as a transformative process means the *Aufhebung* of both approaches into a left theory of transformation and its realisation in a practice a dialectical intertwining of reformist and revolutionary changes.

Generations of social-democratic reformers have worked on the theoretical foundations of paths to reform. They have viewed bourgeois capitalist societies as basically formable in a democratic and social direction to an unlimited degree. They were able, by means of reforms, to win political liberties, considerable improvements for wage workers and welfare-state security systems, without calling the dominance of profit or the underlying issues of the ownership of property into question. But they have not been able to prevent the polarisation between rich and poor, the exploitation of large parts of the earth’s population, devastating crises, wars, or the acute endangerment of the biosphere.

Generations of communists oriented themselves towards a revolution theory in which they viewed western societies as reduced to their basic capitalist structure. Their potential for evolution was denied under communist orthodoxy, and greater improvements expected only beyond the Rubicon of revolution. In the west, this led them into isolation. The communist revolutions of the twentieth century replaced capitalist oppression with monopolistic party structures, brought greater social equality, broad popular education and progress in gender equality, but radically limited individual freedom, destroyed the environment even more than capitalism was doing, and, with their centralist economic regulation, so restricted innovation that state socialism in Europe ultimately failed economically, too.

In the history of the left, reformists and revolutionaries have always fought each other and have thus weakened the left. They saw reform and revolution as mutually antagonistic, and generally saw them as devoid of any linkage. A left theory of transformation will leave such antinomic thinking behind it.

FIRST,

it is characteristic of emancipatory transformation processes that they can combine reforms with upheavals of revolutionary depth. The strength of reformism is that it makes change possible via a long series of many practicable partial reforms. It is the weakness of reform-

ism that it shrinks back before changing capitalism's basic structures, or its conditions of property and power. The attainable change therefore remains limited, due to the fact that the dominance of profit has hardly been challenged.

The strength of revolutionary concepts is that they aim at the transgression of the boundaries of capitalism, and consistently press for the necessary changes. Their weakness is that they place little value on the reforms possible within bourgeois capitalist societies, and see them as at best instruments for leading the masses toward the hoped-for revolution.

A left theory of transformation is able to overcome the weaknesses of both concepts of societal renewal, and to incorporate their strengths in itself. Reform and revolution do not exclude each other categorically. Revolutionary change can come about in the form of sudden breaks, but even in such cases, it at the same time includes a wide variety of reform steps, in which only some of the changes are deep breaks. Reforms, the totality of which under the preconditions of continual changes in the relationship of forces in favour of more far-reaching demands, ultimately amounts at the bottom line to profound revolutionary change, are not the total counter-pole to such change.

A just, sustainable, peaceful society based on solidarity, which can be described as democratic socialism, is not only to be expected as a future societal structure in the great beyond of present conditions, but must rather also be seen as a goal and also as a development, the elements of which can already take shape today, and which can already be of orienting significance for present alternative action.

SECOND:

Thus can democratic socialism become a matter of this world, for all those who expect of left politics improvements in their present working and daily lives – today, not some day, and long before capitalism calls it quits. At the same time however, transformation means opening up presently practicable reforms to steps leading beyond capitalism. Transforma-

tion means incorporating hope and a vision into what is feasible today. It overcomes the self-restraint to the next steps, without dissolving them in illusions. A transformation strategy can prove to be more capable of mobilisation than single ideas for reform which offer no perspective, or than a utopia which fails to change the here-and-now.

THIRDLY,

a transformation process opens up the opportunity of being better able to overcome deep-rooted delimitations of different leftists against each other. The concentration of one group, the "revolutionists" upon protest and resistance to the existing system and propagation of a future socialist order, and of the other, the "pragmatists", on presently practicable partial steps, can become conceivable as different contributions to a uniform overall process, between the exponents of which bridges can be built, because what is at issue is the contradictory moments of one and the same process. The potentials for change of extra-parliamentary struggles, parliamentary work and work in government gain greater strength through the conscious linkage to an emancipatory transformation process than through a delimitation of their protagonists and strategies from one another. Viewed reformistically or revolutionistically, reforms within capitalism and upheavals which go beyond it appear insulated against one another. Viewed transformationally, on the other hand, and acted upon accordingly, both developments can be shaped as a uniform process with many transitions.

FOURTHLY,

the attitude opens up the possibility of broad alliances in a presumably long process of transformation. In periods in which a completely different society cannot in any case be the task as yet, alliances for partial goals can be concluded in which radical protagonists cooperate with moderate forces whose goal is nothing more than a better capitalism. In such phases, even alliances of the majority with strategically thinking factions of the power elites are possible in order to prevent global

dangers to humankind, even if the latter see the possible partial steps towards social or ecological change primarily as an opportunity to safeguard their power.

THE SECOND GREAT TRANSFORMATION: ALLIANCES AND DEMOCRACY

The alliances which the grass roots of an emancipatory transformation process can build are determined by its contents and its character. The reforms in the phase of welfare-state regulated capitalism, which Ralf Dahrendorf described as the age of social democracy, were supported by a middle-top alliance. The classic social-democratic reforms were implemented by governments from the top down – whether recruited from the social-democratic parties, from President Roosevelt’s Democratic Party in the USA, or in some countries, under the pressure of circumstances, even from conservative parties – together with the broad middle strata of society, particularly male skilled worker and their trade unions. Women, predominantly dependent on the male family breadwinner, were generally assigned a rather passive role. The lower strata were rather pacified by social security systems, more than being active allies. This social base of social-democratic reform politics explains both its considerable successes over the course of several decades, and also its limitations.

Future transformation processes will have a different social base. Their opportunity is a middle-bottom alliance based on democracy and solidarity. Michael Brie has, based on the study by Rita Müller-Hilmer for the Social-Democratic Friedrich Ebert Foundation, *Gesellschaft im Reformprozess* [Society in a process of reform] (Müller Hilmer, 2006), and on Gero Neugebauer’s work *Politische Milieus in Deutschland* [political identity groups in Germany] (Neugebauer, 2007), determined that of the political identity groups investigated there, which were compiled to six for the sake of simplicity, at least three large groupings could enter into an alliance of interest groups for a transformation to a sustainable society of solidarity: the social-libertarian middle class, the threatened core staff in corporations, and the

sub-proletarian groups, or the “modern precariat” (Brie, 2007: 13 -45; Institute for Social Analysis 2/2009: 10 ff). The possibility for a broad historical block uniting these political identity groups and other forces emerges from the fact that the desirable characteristics of a just society of solidarity as outlined in Section 3, as the contents of an emancipatory transformation, correspond to the interests of thoroughly different social groups of the majority of the population. But this will merely be a possibility, as long as the left is not able to present its transformational ideas as an attractive societal project for the entire spectrum of potential actors, which provides solutions for the urgent problems of the present and at the same time longer-term perspectives for liveable lives. But even if this were to succeed – and many initiatives for such a project do already exist – this would not yet suffice to win majorities for the decision to actively support such a transformation project. Two things would be necessary in addition: that the left and other democratic exponents of a society of solidarity at least potentially recognise the power to actually succeed in implementing such a project, and that they be seen as possessing the expertise and the skills needed to carry it out. At present, neither applies to the left in Germany, or in Europe. The left in Europe is at present not an actor capable of hegemony, unlike the situation in a number of Latin American countries.

Work on building a broad middle-bottom alliance is thus a central task for all left forces, so as to enable the entry into a Second Great Transformation. This will require:

- > “A long (or ever?) unknown willingness for cooperation and communication not only between these tendencies (within the left, D.K.), but also between everything in which they differentiate themselves: spaces and options for action, modes of reflection, strategies to be played out nationally and internationally, strategic alliances, political concepts and possible alternative projects.” (Seibert, 2009: 7).
- > Considerable strengthening of the skills of alternative actors in a wide variety of politi-

cal areas, their application in concrete projects for the solution of burning questions in the interest of the lower strata and the middle of society, and thus “to shift everyday practices” leftwards (Brand, 2009: 43).

- > Providing the concrete struggles with a common direction, determined by an attractive left societal project as an alternative to capitalism. For: “we must be able to imagine an alternative, if we want to change anything” (Ceceña, 2009: 20).

A democratic renewal will succeed in a second great transformation only as a process carried of the majority, or not at all.

THE SECOND GREAT TRANSFORMATION: THE TIME WINDOW PROBLEM

A future transformation which already initiates a change towards solidarity under the given conditions of bourgeois capitalism, but which, according to the expectations of large portions of the left, is to lead to overcoming the dominance of profit in society, contains a deep contradiction. Such a transformation will presumably be a long process of searching and learning, in the course of continual struggles of contending classes and social groups. But in contradiction to this long-term horizon, very far-reaching steps for the prevention of a climate catastrophe, of other environmental hazards, and of the death of many millions of people from hunger, deficiency diseases, destruction of the environment and wars in the poor countries, are of the utmost urgency. According to the conviction of a large majority of climatologists, humankind has only a short time window of a decade or a decade and a half to just barely ward off the tipping of climate change into a climate catastrophe with far-reaching changes – albeit even so with very severe damage. The power of the present rulers will not be broken during this period, nor will the profit system which is destroying the environment be overcome.

Is it conceivable that a change in the relationship between society and nature, which could save the stability of the climate, and which is not possible without considerable change in

the conditions within society itself, could, as an the essential part of a coming transformation, proceed more rapidly than the presumable emergence of a democratic, socialist society? Will it be possible, in the fight against the destructive policy of the rulers, to force policy changes and compromises from farsighted and responsible parts of the power elites that could lead to such solutions to humankind’s problems as a solar energy revolution and a policy climate turnaround, or the abolition of all nuclear weapons?

Not a few leftists reject the idea of such cross-class survival pacts as unrealistic. As Susan George wrote: “A further illusion is to assume that corporations and rich countries will at least change their behaviour when they see they are demolishing the life of the planet on which we all have to live. This is perhaps the most pernicious of all fallacies because it would seem so clearly in the interests of everyone, including elites, to preserve our ecological base. Personally, I don’t think they can stop even if they want to, even for their own children. Capitalism is like that famous bicycle that has to keep moving forward or topple over – and corporations are all competing to see who can pedal fastest, straight into the brick wall.”² But the question is, whether this may not be an overly economic view, whether the political relationship of forces cannot be considerably modified by change in the mode of action and the intensity of effect of economic laws, and by a change of cultural views and of the legal framework.

Like Susan George, Neil Smith (Smith, 2008), Paul Burkett (Burkett, 2006), Victor Wallis (Wallis, 2008), Tadzio Müller and Stefan Kaufmann (Müller/Kaufmann, 2009), Harald Welzer (Welzer, 2008) and Elmar Altvater (Altvater, 2009) similarly exclude the opening of the gate to ecological sustainability by a turn to green capitalism. “The ‘moderates’ have, with their obstinate attempts to elicit an ecological remedy from a system that obsessively tramples down everything in its path, lost all sense of realism.” (Wallis, 2008: 882). Other leftists who embed the indispensable criticism of the con-

² <http://pubs.socialistreviewindex.org.uk/isj91/george.htm>

cept of green capitalism in a transformational-theoretical approach, contradict such exclusively antagonistic thinking (Wolf, 2009, 2009; Klein, 2009). There are many good reasons not to see green capitalism as the solution to the environmental crisis. But this is only half the truth. For according to all historical experience, the mobile boundaries of capitalism always include considerable potentials for adaptation and play within them. The possibility that partial successes could result in the ecologisation of the economy and society, even under conditions of capitalism, cannot be ruled out. The left should use this space of possibility to enter upon a socio-ecological reconstruction of society. Instead of assuming the role of objectors by denying capitalism any potential for stronger environmental orientation, it should recognise the differences within the ruling block and put on public pressure for the fulfilment of many promises made by the rulers for sustainable development. Socio-ecological reconstruction should, for the left, constitute a key aspect of a Second Great Transformation.

A Green New Deal certainly could be initiated in the context of tension between a green capitalism supported primarily by sections of the power elites conscious of the looming dangers, and the contradictions and limits just indicated. It could, in the context of changes in the societal relation of forces, increasingly lead in a socio-ecological reconstruction, which, under pressure from the forces of counter-power, would be carried out on the basis of democracy and solidarity. The Green New Deal itself would have to be understood as a process, the social content and environmentally effective scope of which would be changing.

Are there historical parallels which argue for the possibility of cross-class alliances in questions of human survival, or for strategic political action of parts of the power elites themselves against basic tendencies of the profit mechanism?

The development of the New Deal in the USA during the thirties can only in part be seen as a parallel. It was not about a global problem of humankind, it was about maintaining the capitalist system after the deep shock of the world

economic crisis of 1929-'32; it was about a "practical reaction, carried out from above, to the failure of the ruling class of America" (Carlson/Unger, 1992: 34, 29 ff.), implemented by the presidency of Franklin D. Roosevelt. The New Deal was not a strategy planned from the start. It was forced by a deep systemic crisis, by a delegitimisation of big business, and by the electoral defeat of the Republicans, who had ruled up to that time. It arose out of a movement for the self-organisation of the workers, influenced by the upswing of social reformist ideas and strongly characterised by left-liberal, previously largely disinterested intellectuals and artists. A section of the ruling class saw itself forced against its will – and against the bitter resistance of the conservative majority of the power elite – to gradually implement a package of reforms which ultimately ended up as a Fordistic distribution compromise. But this development was only consolidated when, in view of the rise of Hitler's fascism and of the looming World War, massive armaments programmes led the economy out of the continuing depression.

Yet we can ascertain: there was a crisis which threatened the power structure, public consciousness was moving to the left, there was pressure from of the masses who were profoundly insecure, and intellectuals were involved in a democratic movement, all of which was able to move a minority of the power elite, in the teeth of opposition from the majority of the ruling class, to implement the greatest break in American history, in terms of the political role of the state and its social responsibility.

The fact that after the Second World War, the experiences of the New Deal and the welfare-state path of Scandinavian countries for decades fed into the structure of welfare-state regulated capitalism on the OECD scale was due to the historically special growth conditions, and also to outside pressure in the East-West conflict of systems.

Today, most of these concrete, historical conditions of the New Deal are not present. The ruling class did not by any means, in the management of the present crisis, fail as sensa-

tionally as it did in 1929-'32 (Van der Pijl, 2009: 29 ff). It has been able to prevent a collapse of employment such as occurred during the Depression, as well as a total collapse of the financial system and the flight into protectionism. The recent crisis has not been heightened to the point of a political power crisis. Unlike the crisis of 1929-'32, the trade unions have not gained in fighting strength; rather, they have been weakened. At present, it is not the democrats or the social democrats in Europe, but the conservatives who are on the rise. But they have learned, as the coalition of the conservative CDU/CSU and the liberal FDP in Germany shows, to channel the pressure from below by means of moderate socio-political concessions. Roosevelt's New Deal only worked because it was supported by drastic institutional change: the state's power to intervene in the market was strengthened to a far higher degree than is the case today, especially once the war economy was instituted. The trade unions were broadly included in administrative regulatory institutions at that time. At present, no such conditions prevail. Unlike during the post-war period, we have today no particularly favourable growth conditions, and certainly no pressure from any powerful counter-force, such as the Soviet Union was at that time.

But it is not the strength of the conservative forces, but primarily the weakness of the left that is characteristic of the situation in Europe today. This can change. In the USA, the announced programme of Barack Obama is certainly reminiscent of the project of the New Deal – without being able to be based on a militant working class, however. Although the implosion of state socialism has freed the western power elites from outside pressure to act, it has also deprived them of the glue of internal cohesion with reference to an external threat. The economic space to be able to meet full-blown challenges is substantially greater today than it was during the crisis of 1929-'32. The differences relative to the era of Roosevelt's New Deal are thus ambivalent, and need not argue conclusively against the ability of the power elites today to learn lessons, compared with what pertained at that time.

An additional experience regarding the ability of sections of the power elites to learn under shock is shown by their behaviour during the Second World War, and during the phase of "new thinking", arms control and disarmament towards the end of the Cold War. The military expansion of Germany and the threat to bourgeois civilisation posed by fascism led to an alliance of the western powers with the hated Soviet Union. Their long delay in opening a second front in the West against Hitler's Germany reflects the reluctance of powerful sections of the ruling elite with regard to that alliance. Eric Hobsbawm wrote about this coalition which bridged classes and ideologies: "And, as it turned out, the crucial lines in this [international – D.K.] civil war were not drawn between capitalism as such and communist social revolution, but between ideological families: on the one hand the descendants of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment and the great revolutions including, obviously, the Russian Revolution; on the other, its opponents. In short, the frontier ran not between capitalism and communism, but between what the nineteenth century would have called 'progress' and 'reaction' – only that these terms were no longer quite apposite." (Hobsbawm, 1994: *The Age of Extremes*, p. 144.)

During the war, the USA very rapidly – under state control and with the cooperation of the trade unions – accomplished the conversion of large parts of the civilian economy to arms production. In the context of the Manhattan Project for the production of the American atomic bomb, the work of more than a hundred thousand people in hundreds of scientific facilities and production centres was coordinated across all boundaries of competition. Lester R. Brown concluded: "This mobilisation of resources within a matter of months demonstrates that a country and, indeed, the world can restructure the economy quickly if convinced of the need to do so." (Brown, 2008: 280).

When after the Second World War the military and particularly the nuclear potentials of the opponents in the Cold War did ensure a balance of terror, but at the same time threatened the existence of large portions of humankind

and thus also endangered the power the rulers of the world, the long-term survival interests, too, of parts of the ruling class finally won out over aggressiveness of the hawks and the interests of the military-industrial complex. It proved possible to implement the concept of mutual security in arms control treaties and disarmament agreements.

We can thus ascertain: If the power of the elites and of human civilisation are threatened, realistic sectors of these elites are capable of far-reaching political redirection of the economy and also of making arrangements even with their most terrible opponents – if only the profit system can thus be upheld.

For the strategy of the left, including the LEFT PARTY, this is of very great significance. There is a considerable difference between having on the one hand to assume that warding off the climate catastrophe, accelerated species extinction or other environmental crises can be successful only in a post-capitalist society – i.e., after major catastrophes – or on the other, that a considerable change in the societal relationship of forces, a transition from the neo-liberal developmental stage of capitalism to a post-neo-liberal phase of green capitalism can be implemented. In the second case, the chances are greater for initiating the necessary socio-ecological reorganisation, because progress can also be supported by sections of the power elite.

A comparison of the threat also to the western power elites from the fascist war of aggression and later from the threat of nuclear war, with the danger posed by a climate catastrophe, the results of decimated biodiversity and continued poverty in large regions of the world, would however have to take a considerable difference into account: The dangers today are more a creeping threat, not so much an immediate and visible one, as they were at that time. They are much easier to repress. At least the environmental threats are not the work of hostile powers; rather, they operate more or less invisibly. This makes a learning process in the power elites under shock, as in 1929-'32, in the Second World War, or under the impact of a strategic nuclear balance of terror more

improbable. However, the great dangers of the twenty-first century are actually greater than those of the twentieth century, even for the rulers. Moreover, climate change will increase in seriousness very rapidly. The costs of the necessary reactions to it will be all the higher the longer climate policy change fails to be implemented. The disruption of the ecological balance will be a particularly heavy burden upon the people in the poor countries of the world, and could lead to very intense reactions. The oil price increases to be expected also hit them particularly hard. That could enhance state failure in large regions of the world and give international terrorism new impetus. In any case, the interweaving of various processes of crisis and instability will continue. The possible modified reproduction of neo-liberal capitalism and a renewed financial crisis could lead to a shock situation, even for the ruling elites.

In view of a renaissance of a bourgeois humanist sense of responsibility as outlined above, the possibility within the context of an only very brief historical time window, of pressing mobile factions of the power elites to take decisive steps to stabilise the climate and reduce other major threats cannot be ruled out. However, the present relation of forces gives cause for justifiable doubt about it.

If however responsible circles in the ruling class can win out, such a development could be seen by the LEFT PARTY as part of a transformational process, and create an *Aufhebung*, to the extent possible within capitalism, towards a further-reaching perspective of new societal relations with nature. Thus, a Green New Deal would be a process of socio-ecological reconstruction which would start in the post-neo-liberal phase of a partially greened capitalism, and would be continued more perfectly in a post-capitalist development – constituting a central characteristic of emancipatory alternatives, or of democratic socialism. For a considerable time, however, the success of such a process would depend on a combination of powerful pressure from below and ecological change from above. Due to the profit mechanism, it must be expected that a green capitalism, inasmuch as it would be

pushed by parts of the power elites, would be implemented very much at the expense of the waged strata, the underprivileged and the majority in the world's non-competitive countries, and would moreover be oriented towards a growth which would threaten to eat up ecological advances again. Precisely for that reason, a block of democratic socio-ecological counter-forces working to drive the development beyond green capitalism will be needed.

In this contradiction-filled sense, a capitalism potentially capable – albeit to a limited degree – of a green reconstruction can be expected, as a historical parallel to the capitalism of the 1980s, which was capable of mutual security, arms control and disarmament. The conditions for that are that the struggle of counter-forces for democratic socio-ecological change, development and peace, while not powerful enough to force an end to capitalism in the foreseeable future, will be strong enough to make use of clashes of interests and elements of ecological reason in the power elites, and to force them to implement urgent changes in environmental, energy and climate policy. Success is possible if the pressure of the dangers is great enough to force both sides to change their behaviour, and if the conflicts within the ruling block are decided in favour of the more flexible forces, which are more open to global responsibility.

The LEFT PARTY must draw conclusions from such strategic considerations in its programmatic structure and its politics, which fit into a transformation strategy. That must include politics for building a middle-bottom alliance which, in global questions affecting humankind, can go as far as joint action, albeit fraught with contradictions, with parts of the power elites.

THE SECOND GREAT TRANSFORMATION: IMPLICATIONS FOR CONCRETE POLITICS

Considerations of transformation theory are not merely of programmatic significance. However, they have generally not even been dealt with in the programmes of leftist parties.

The programmatic approaches of the European Left Party are amongst the exceptions. However, the transformation strategy also has significance for strategic and practical political action, beyond the programmatic structure of the left. Examples include:

- > Implications for the positioning of the left in the debate over CO₂ emissions certificates in climate policy, and with regard to such issues as the current Desertec project;
- > left structural policy with regard to electric cars;
- > left conclusions for the consolidation of the financial system.

Let us discuss these points briefly.

CO₂ EMISSIONS CERTIFICATES:

In the debate over CO₂ emissions certificates, the difference between the reform of capitalism and reforms as an element of transformational processes becomes very clearly visible. For those sections of the power elites sensitised to environmental issues, the introduction of emissions trading with CO₂ certificates is the market-compatible main path towards reduction of carbon dioxide pollution and increased global warming, since it leads to energy price increases and hence to a reduction in greenhouse gas emissions. Left critics reject the use of this instrument because artificially designed rights to pollute the environment expand precisely the same market mechanism which has led us into the environmental disaster in the first place (Altvater/ Brunnengräber, 2008: 10 pp.). However, their legitimate criticism would no longer be correct if emissions trading could be turned into an instrument of the socio-ecological transformation process. This would mean that in the context of “cap and trade” – capping total permissible emissions while trading emissions certificates – absolute priority would have to be assigned to tough goals for mandatory reduction of emissions through international treaties and national regulations. The primary allocation of emissions rights should be based on the principle of the equal rights of all the earth's inhabitants to environmental space. This would

force the rich countries to purchase rights from the developing countries, and provide the latter with considerable funds for investment in climate protection. Moreover, the allocation should be accomplished by the auction of emissions rights, instead of free, as has been the case in the European Union to date. Moreover, financial compensation for the expected price increases should be guaranteed for the underprivileged segments of the population. Under such conditions, even the market instruments of a Green New Deal, in combination with regulatory, rather than market-compatible instruments, and active preferential treatment for renewable energies, could be harnessed for a socio-ecological transformation. More important for alternative climate policy, however, than the use of market elements would be the political limitation of the supply of fossil fuel sources, which should be left in the ground; environmental stipulations and bans and the support for a decentralised energy industry; an energy saving lifestyle; and the societal control or socialisation of companies if their profit interests block sustainable climate policy.

However, politics in the context of a transformation project would require not only that partial social and ecological reforms within the context of capitalism be exhaustively used and opened up for further-reaching changes, but also that projects be resisted which set the course in a wrong direction and obstruct a sustainable future. A prime example of this is the Desertec project; another, the lopsided hopes being placed in electric cars as an environmental solution for individual motorised traffic.

THE DESERTEC PROJECT:

The Desertec Industrial initiative, a consortium of initially twenty German and international corporations, was inaugurated on 13 July 2009, with the goal of building solar power stations in the deserts of North Africa for a probably grossly underestimated capital expenditure of €400 billion, to provide both electric power supplies to Africa and to cover about 15 per cent of European demand for electric power. Members of the consortium include

the Deutsche Bank, which is to find and bring together investors to fund the project; Munich Re; the power companies RWE and Eon; Siemens and Schott Solar; MAN Solar Millennium; the Swiss technology corporation ABB; the Spanish company Abengoa Solar; and the largest private corporation in Algeria, the Cevital Group. The project was welcomed emphatically by the media as “the greatest private eco-power initiative of all times” (*Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 19 June 2009). Gerhard Knies, chair of the supervisory board of the Desertec Foundation, explained: “I would like to express my congratulations to industry, as saving the world may be the greatest ethical task and at the same time the biggest business deal of the future.” (*Süddeutsche Zeitung*, July 13, 2009). Greenpeace approves of the project, as do Chancellor Angela Merkel and opposition leader Sigmar Gabriel.

But such a type of projects is precisely not the point of connection of leftists to corporate strategy and the politics of the rulers. Desertec means building an extreme version of a private power monopoly in a decisive field for the future. Desertec stands for those contours of green capitalism which point in the wrong direction. Energy supply in North Africa would be monopolised, instead of strengthening development policy by means of a decentralised energy supply system. This power concentration would internationalise and cement monopoly pricing policy in the energy sector. The potentials of renewable energies for decentralisation and communalisation, for local jobs, for democratic influence of citizens on their energy supply and local economic structures would be gambled away. Moreover, according to estimates by critical energy experts, the project could become more expensive than a decentralised mix of various renewable energies. Hermann Scheer, president of Eurosolar and an Alternative Nobel Prize laureate, expects that by the time Desertec is able to deliver power – in 2020 at the earliest – decentralised solar and wind power in Germany will be cheaper than Desertec power. He wrote: “The corporations are pursuing the goal of prolonging the structures of today’s energy supply into the age of renewable energies. Desertec means power from a single consortium, which

would control production plants and transmission lines alike.” (manager-magazin.de, 13 July 2009) – at a time when even the EU Commission is forcing energy corporations to split up their grids.

Desertec is an outstanding example for the fact that the narrowness of the climate and energy policy time window is a challenge to de-link strategic structural decisions from the extrapolation of the old destructive structures – *now*, not sometime in the future. Exactly the reverse is being done, however, with this celebrated desert power project.

THE ELECTRIC CAR PROJECT:

A second example for the reproduction of inappropriate structures in green guise is being heralded in the marketing campaign for electric cars. Apart from the fact that they would not be a particularly environmentally friendly solution if the energy they consume were provided by coal and oil-fired plants, they would also change very little in the existing mobility structure. Concentrating on them distracts from the development of public transport, reducing overall traffic volumes and shifting it to the rails. Its use as a bare substitute for petrol-run vehicles does not challenge existing urban structures: the consumption of public space as a space for the flow, congestion and the paid parking of the ubiquitous auto; the time-consuming separation of home, work and culture; the uncontrolled urban sprawl into the landscape; and the elimination of the shops next door for the benefit of supermarkets in outlying areas. We would be confirming individualistic mobility and lifestyles, while leaving traffic congestion unchanged. Prestige consumerism can also come in an electrically powered version. The left should accept the advantages that electric cars provide with moderate individual use, as taxis, rental cars and in car-sharing fleets as a part of an overall ecological plan for modern mobility. But its abuse for the prolongation of individualistic, consumerist lifestyles and societal structures is not an acceptable perspective. “A hegemonic block of neo-liberal policy, dream factories, major corporations, trade unions and waged employees as well as the broad mass of work-

ers has emerged, for whom ‘cars are us’ seems to be the no-alternative model – materially and intellectually, rationally and emotionally, economically and politically.” (Brie, 2009: 169).

Again, the challenge now is, within a narrow time window, to at least set the direction for a type of mobility that will preserve the environment, as part of a non-consumerist society. The way there can be marked by a public passenger transport system that is restful, pleasant and, in future, free of charge, its connection points reachable within a few minutes from the points of departure; by reduced working hours, as compensation, too, for sometimes greater time spent for mobility; by a transition to urban structures based on short routes; by attractive local recreation possibilities; by possibilities for self-realisation in education, culture and sports instead of in high-powered sedans; and by aesthetically designed public spaces instead of streams of cars. The electric car, too, may have a place in such a picture.

The point is that what is now feasible not block the path to the future, but that it be inserted into a broader transformational process from the point of view of left politics. This can be shown, too, by way of left demands for the renewal of the financial system.

RENEWING THE FINANCIAL SYSTEM:

The left has presented a wide variety of concrete suggestions for overcoming the dominance of the financial markets in the economy and society, for far-reaching restrictive measures on the banking system in the area of deposit banking, for the stable supply of the economy with loans, and for democratic control of the financial markets (Alternative Economic Policy Working Group, 2009; Wahl: 2009). The demands from the left spectrum include immediately necessary measures, such as the elimination of especially destabilising practices and instruments. These include a ban on credit securitisations, on credit default swaps, on off-market financial futures, and on short selling. They also include initiatives for a

repeal of the admittance of hedge funds in Germany, for a ban on operations with foreign hedge funds by German banks, and for the abolition of misplaced incentives for manager compensation. Other demands are aimed more towards a medium-term reform of the financial system, such as the roll-back and strict control of investment banking, stricter regulations for capital-based retirement plans, to keep them away from speculative operations, in the interest of the insured, for strict public supervision of private rating agencies and the establishment of public rating institutes, and for the introduction of transaction taxes on security and exchange transactions, deceleration of the financial markets, and restrictions of speculation (Bundestag-Printed Matter 16/7191 / The LEFT PARTY).

Thinking in terms of the transformation process however, the present steps towards the stabilisation of the financial system would, according to the concept of the LEFT PARTY, be planned as entry projects for the transformation of the private monopolistic financial system dominated by short-term profit, to a public financial system dedicated to emancipatory goals and the socio-ecological reconstruction of society. This was expressed in the bill introduced by the parliamentary group of the LEFT PARTY in the Bundestag on 29 January 2009: "Socialise the big banks" (Printed Matter 16/11747; Arenz 2009).

For example, state participation in banks not should be constituted as silent partnerships, but should rather be tied to the prerequisite of mandatory public influence not of daily operations, but certainly of the direction of corporate policy. State participations in systemically important financial institutions should not be held only for as short a time as possible and then liquidated again, but should be used as an entry into growing public, democratic influence on the reorganisation of the financial system.

Thus, nationalisations would lead to a process of socialisation: public bank ownership and public influence on control of the property of private banks, public monitoring, stipulations, bans and political policy directives should be combined in such a way that the transforma-

tion of the highly speculative financial system oriented toward shareholder value, to a banking system with the primary task of providing credit to manufacturing companies and especially to projects of socio-ecological reconstruction could be initiated.

A left transformation project would be designed so as to be simultaneously social and ecological. In that way, leftists, trade unions and social movements intend to prevent the main burden of the financial crisis and other crises from being passed on to waged employees and underprivileged groups. Demands like that of the LEFT PARTY for a temporary millionaires' tax of five per cent on private fortunes of €1 million or more have that in mind. The suggestion to impose a temporary special tax on managers of private financial institutions of 80 per cent of annual incomes over €600,000 has the same thrust. That would ensure the national budget income which would counteract the temptation to master the escalating national debt by further dismantling social expenditures. IG Metal (the German metalworkers' union) has proposed a public equity fund stocked with at least €100 billion, with which the state could buy shares in companies facing bankruptcy, with the goal of securing jobs, if necessary, through ecologically oriented conversion. This fund would be financed by a forced loan of two per cent on private fortunes above €750,000.

But at the same time, a determining public influence on the financial system to be restructured is urgent primarily because there must be an assurance that the tax money pumped into the banking system be invested for socio-ecologically sensible economic development, instead of flowing into speculative financial investments once again, or fuelling inflation.

An intermediate result: considerations of transformation theory are not an abstract matter for programmatic debates detached from reality; rather they have orienting significance for strategies and concrete politics.

THE SECOND GREAT TRANSFORMATION: THE POLITICAL CULTURE OF THE LEFT

An emancipatory transformation process based on a renewal of the democracy will necessarily also include a renewal of the political culture of the left. Even merely transcending the antagonistic confrontation between reform and revolution in the discourse of the left will require fundamentally overcoming the deeply rooted negative culture of mutual accusations, defamatory statements and exclusion.

A transformational process of seeking and learning is completely incompatible with residual ideas on the left about being in possession of a monopoly on the truth about the future path and shape of society. Instead, a culture of argument will be necessary, of listening and checking arguments and counter-arguments, of toleration and of learning, too, from those who think differently. In the party-constituted left with a state-socialist history, this will require a complete break with Stalinist structures, such as the SED/PDS undertook at its founding party congress in 1989, when East Germany's ruling SED added "democratic socialism" to its name and dropped its claim to sole power. The centralistic structure of state socialism, the narrowness of the intellectual framework of Marxist-Leninism, and the sanctification of the party line suffocated all political culture. "We said that it was better to be wrong with the party than to be right outside it and against it." (Semprun, 1981: 82). The end of state socialism was therefore also a liberation of culture in the broad sense, and particularly of political culture. However, liberation from dogmatic thought structures and an open political culture remain a permanent task. They concern the entire left, and not at all only those parts of it with communist or state-socialist origins.

An open, communicative and cooperative political culture is also a requirement for communication between the very different political identity groups which could implement the emancipatory transformation process. These identity groups are distinguished to a large

degree by their specific cultural habits, which are characteristic to their members. Again, toleration, considerable empathy, sensitive language and learning of differences will be required to make this community in diversity politically productive. This is all the more true of the political balancing act needed to keep step, in the struggle *against the rulers*, with the more farsighted and more flexible parts of the power elites who want to fight the climate catastrophe, bring a nuclear-free world closer, and ease poverty. In his book *Rage and Time*, the philosopher Peter Sloterdijk suggests the language of rage as the fundamental communications tool which moves development forward. Without a doubt, such language is appropriate for the purposes of accusation against attitudes and behaviours hostile to humanity. However, it is doubtful whether a pure language of rage can, without differentiation, be the language of left political culture. It will hardly be able to reach that majority of citizens, who see opportunities for the design of their own lives in processes of individualisation, diversity of lifestyles, international division of labour and cultural encounter, progress in gender emancipation, self-responsibility and similar processes. And an exclusively aggressive language will certainly build no bridges to those in the halls of power who are willing, against their own some short-term interests, to give the priority to reason in questions of human survival.

Briefly, a future emancipatory transformation of society will require a new political culture of the left. People can change society if their concrete interests, their emotions and their intellect flow together to form a torrent up upheaval. Even if that does require collective protagonists, it also involves an inner decision by millions of individuals to take the renewal of society into their own hands. Rudolf Bahro formulated it briefly: "There will only be as much new direction as there are individuals who take a new direction." (Bahro 1989: 464). Talcott Parsons saw as fundamental social change the result of a fundamental change in values in the cultural sphere of society, and the internalisation of this cultural change by individuals (Parsons, 1969). According to Günter

Anders, cultural changes must cause a politically relevant part of active people to acquire incomparably more depth of feeling and empathy. Only thus might the "Promethean gap" between their power to transform, reminiscent of the bold energy of Prometheus, and the limitation of human capacity for responsibility for the consequences of their behaviour, be closed (Anders, 1985: 266). Douglass North has argued that the enormous difference in processes of change in societies shows that the cultural component, together with changes of institutions, is central, too, for a change in economics and politics over the course of time (North, 2005: IX).

In the works quoted, there are repeated references to drastic changes in the basic socio-cultural situation of societies and individuals under the pressure of extreme tensions and dangers. In such cases, the cultural-intellectual constitution of a society can, for a historical moment, become decisive for great transformational progress. For the historian and researcher of revolution Manfred Kossok, "an upheaval in philosophical thinking (as the core element of a general cultural revolution) is one of the three decisive levels of revolutionary upheaval" (Kossok, 1988: 44).

The necessary renewal of the political culture of the left, including the LEFT PARTY, will only be a part of such a general cultural revolution. The rapid unfolding by the left of its own political culture of solidarity will strengthen it in the coming intellectual-political struggles for the way forward after the crisis, by means of a commonality that can overcome disagreements of opinion, and through the increased credibility and the moral appeal of such a culture. Moreover, the cultural level of interpersonal relationships will, in the inevitable future change of ways of life, be of first-rate significance. However, even a left culture will not exist outside the influences of competitive capitalist society, so that the change of the culture of the left will become a part of its project for a just society of freedom, social equality and solidarity for all.

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