

**Are socialist policies possible when holding governmental responsibility?  
Five objections by Rosa Luxemburg and five offers for discussion**

Contribution held at the Rosa-Luxemburg-Conference of the Rosa-Luxemburg-Foundation, March 3 and 4, 2006

First objection: Capitalism cannot be changed in its essence

Second objection: Only a revolution can solve the basic problems

Third objection: The state – only the instrument of rule of the economically ruling class

Fourth objection: Governmental participation weakens the Left

Fifth objection: The Left by its governmental participation only makes the continuation of right-wing policy possible

Appendix: centre-left governments in India, Brazil, Venezuela, Argentina, and South Africa – a very incomplete comparison

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The problem of participation in bourgeois governments by socialists and Communists, meaning those, whose goal is the surpassing of Capitalist society, unlike many think, does not go back to the year 1899, when the French socialist Étienne Alexandre Millerand joined the bourgeois government in France under Waldeck-Rousseau, but to the year 1848, when Louis Blanc entered into the Provisional Government that was formed during the February revolution. His attempts at reshaping labour relations (buying up of mines and railroads, centralisation of the insurance system, founding of cooperatives, abolition of free prices, national workshops for providing for the unemployed and right to work<sup>1</sup>) stayed rather unsuccessful. His balancing act between the clear representation of the demands of the workers and the attempt to maintain “order” in the sense of the government cost him the support of the masses. Already in May 1848, he had to leave office. With the repression of the workers’ uprising of June 1848, the implementation of his reforms, ultimately pointing beyond capitalism, also became impossible.<sup>2</sup>

Participations of the Left in governments that are dominated by other forces have always given rise to debate. Mainly five objections were formulated against governmental participation by the Left – (1) Capitalism could not be changed in its essence; (2) only a revolution could solve the basic problems; (3) the state was only the political instrument of rule by the economic ruling class; (4) governmental participation necessarily weakened the Left and (5) the Left only made possible the continuation of right-wing policies by entering into their governments.

### **First objection: Capitalism cannot be changed in its essence**

The *first objection* against participation of the Left in governments is that it has up to now in no way resulted in a durable progressive overcoming of capitalism. However, this also holds for all other forms of left politics, even for politics that were controlled by the socialist or Communist parties – at least if one, like the author, holds the assumption that the upheavals that happened in the wake of the October revolution were not in a position to bring forth a socialist order that would do only approximate justice to the democratic-emancipative ideals, would guard and extend the achievements of the bourgeois society, and would produce a way of development

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<sup>1</sup> Marx wrote on that in 1850: “The right to work in the bourgeois sense is a nonsense, a miserable, pious wish; however, behind the right to work, there stands the rule over capital, behind the rule over capital the appropriation of means of production, their subjection under the associated working class, meaning the elimination of wage labour, capital, and their mutual relationships.” Karl Marx: Class struggles in France 1848-1850. In: *MEW*, vol. 7, p. 52.

<sup>2</sup> Marvin F. Cox remarks on Louis Blanc: “From late February until the decisive decline of his influence in April, his standing within the Parisian working class gave him a means for intimidating the moderate majority in the provisional government. Yet rather than use this advantage to force the majority’s hand, he acquiesced in half-measures which maintained the government’s credit among the workers but ultimately worked against the establishment of any kind of social democracy. He thus renounced his demands for a ministry of progress, which would have given him a budget and put functionaries at his disposal and accepted the presidency of the Luxembourg Commission, which had the circumscribed mission of preparing social legislation for the future constituent assembly. More gravely, he continued to serve in the provisional government even after it created ‘national workshops’ whose make-work jobs parodied his plans and discredited his idea of state-fostered industrial employment. After the assembly convened, Blanc failed equally significantly to use his remaining credit with the workers to moderate their militancy and save them, and the republic, from the reprisals which he realised would follow defiance of the conservative majority.” <http://www.ohiou.edu/~Chastain/ac/blanc/htm>.

lastingly superior to capitalism.<sup>3</sup> The idea very clearly expressed by Engels that – while progressing from one electoral success to the next - one would have to keep the ranks firmly closed, should make no essential compromises, should not get involved with the “system”, and then introduce socialism either by achieving a parliamentary majority (by the “reformists”) or by carrying out an upheaval on the basis of the united “revolutionary” working-class, after whose success the bases would be laid for democratic socialism ( by the “revolutionary social democrats”)<sup>4</sup>. Both ways did not work.<sup>5</sup> It is, therefore, untenable that governmental participation has been the cause of the failure of the socialist and Communist movements in the progressive overcoming of capitalism.

The international Left in its various groups, in the light of this background, increasingly puts a *strategy of transformation* into centre stage in order to link concrete reform changes within contemporary society with a fundamental change of the property and power relationships. The open question is what this means for extra-parliamentary and parliamentary work and what role governmental participations can play in that context or not.

That mainly provokes the old question again what change of capitalism means after all? Many Left people of course constantly criticise the retracting of civilisational achievements in today’s societies under the battering ram of neoliberalism and the imposition of financial market capitalism<sup>6</sup>, however, at the same time, they declare capitalism as unable to reform itself. What is worse: reforms are seen as the reason for the victory of fascism in Germany.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Michael Brie: Der sowjetische Staatsparteisozialismus im Lichte der Marxschen Theorie „progressiver Epochen der ökonomischen Gesellschaftsformation“ (Soviet Party State Socialism in the light of the Marxist theory of ‘progressive eras of economic social formations’), in Michael Brie: *Suffering. Essays on the 90s and the early 21<sup>st</sup> century*, an e-book of translations, rlf.

<sup>4</sup> The guiding thread of the evolutionary strategy of the SPD were the remarks by the old Engels in his preface to Marx’ writing: “Class struggles in France” that he wrote in 1895: “Whatever may happen in other countries, German social democracy has a special position and, therefore, at least in the beginning, also a special task. The two million voters that it sends to the ballot boxes, next to the young men and women that stand behind them as non-voters form the most numerous, the most compact mass, the decisive ‘heap of violence’ of the international proletarian army. This mass... grows... relentlessly. Its growth takes place so spontaneously, so continuously, so unavoidably and at the same time, as calmly as a natural process. All government interventions have proven powerless against it... If it goes on like this, we shall conquer until the end of the century the larger part of the middle strata of society, petty bourgeois as well as small peasants, and will grow to be the decisive force in the country, before which all other forces will have to bow, whether they want it or not. To keep this growth uninterruptedly in progress, until it grows over its head to the present governmental system by itself, < not to rip up this heap of force growing stronger on a daily basis, but to keep it intact until the day of decision,> that is our main task.”

<sup>5</sup> It belongs to the unsolved tasks of the new Left to reanalyse the strategic discussions linked to the failure of these two approaches since the 20s of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in a new way.

<sup>6</sup> Compare on that: Michael Brie: Die Linke - was kann sie wollen? (The Left – what can it aim for?), Supplement to *Sozialismus*, Issue 3/2006. English version in: *Suffering*, opus cit.

<sup>7</sup> For instance, it says in Theodor Bergmann: “In 1918, the SPD, instead of the unnecessary bloodshed of revolution, had promised a ‘peaceful growing into socialism’. The bloody rule of German fascism stood at the end of the peaceful way of gradual reforms.” Theodor Bergmann: Friedliches Hereinwachsen in die Kapitulation (Peaceful growing into capitulation), In: *junge Welt*, January 14/15, 2006, p. 11.

The classic confrontation to reformism goes back to the debate on Bernstein's series of articles "Problems of socialism" (1896-1898) and his writing "The prerequisites of socialism and the tasks of social democracy" (1899). Rosa Luxemburg's answer: "Social reform or revolution" that was first published in the *Leipziger Volkszeitung* turned out as the eminent Marxist answer. At the same time, this answer also revealed basic problems of orthodox Marxism.

Bernstein had seen in strong trade unions, the imposition of social reforms, and political democratisation conditions for a change in the quality of society that would point beyond capitalism. Rosa Luxemburg now drew attention to the fact that the trade unions could do nothing else but to push through the "capitalist wage law". The trade unions could, therefore, "not overthrow the wage law; they could at best contain capitalism exploitation within the respectively 'normal' bounds, however, in no way, gradually lift exploitation itself."<sup>8</sup> Just afterwards, she explains: "Each technical upheaval contradicts the interests of the workers directly concerned by it and worsens their immediate position, by devaluing labour power."<sup>9</sup> In attempts, where entrepreneurs and trade unions join in order to regulate volume and prices of commodity production, she sees nothing but the "solidary battle of capital and labour force against consuming society."<sup>10</sup>

The factory laws are seen by Rosa Luxemburg not as a piece of social control and thus a "piece of socialism", as it is done by Bernstein and Konrad Schmidt, but only as "control of the *class organisation of capital over the production process of capital*"<sup>11</sup>. The justification is that the state is "not a 'society' in the sense of the 'upwardly mobile working class, but representative of the *capitalist* society, that means a class state".<sup>12</sup> Where Konrad Schmidt thinks that a division between "superior property rights" and concrete "use und usufruct rights" is possible, where the former is in the hands of the society, the latter also in the hands of the entrepreneurs, she assumes that there exists under capitalism nothing but indivisible private property.

The model of a capitalist society behind such positions assumes implicitly that in these economies and in the societies marked by such economies and especially in the state, there act exclusively capitalist tendencies (if one abstracts of non-capitalist sectors of petty production) – naturally except for the case of a politically organised workers' movement that puts the whole system itself into question. The trade union struggle, according to such a conception brings only the capitalist wage law to its full effect, the social state regulations guarantee nothing else but ordered capital utilisation, the state is nothing but the power instrument of the capitalist class, any struggle for improvement on the basis of the given is actually help to the rulers.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Rosa Luxemburg: Social reform or revolution? In: *Works*, vol. 1.1, p. 389.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>10</sup> Just there, p. 390.

<sup>11</sup> Just there, p. 392.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>13</sup> Marx has helped such ideas to gain hold in many of his works. Thus it says of the demands for reformist change of capitalism in the "Manifesto" that these were nothing but bourgeois socialism: "A second, less systematic, rather more practical form of this socialism sought to spoil any revolutionary movement to the working class by persuading it that not this or the other political change, but only a

Karl Marx had developed, with respect to the struggle he described in the first volume of *Capital* on social regulation and the shortening of the work-day, an idea that puts into question the above-mentioned positions: “And nonetheless, the period from 1848 to 1864 was not without its bright side. Let me mention only two great events here. After a thirty-year long struggle that was conducted with admirable perseverance, the English working class succeeded, using a momentary division in between the landlords and the money lords, to push through the *ten-hour bill*. The great physical, moral, and mental advantages that grew to the factory workers from this measure and that one finds noted in the reports of the factory inspectors every half year are now recognised by everybody. Most continental governments accept the factory law in a more or less changed form, and in England itself, its sphere of application is extended every year by parliament. But aside from its practical importance, this success of this labour law measure had another important meaning. The middle class had, by the most notorious organs of its science, Dr. Ure, Professor Senior and other sages of this ilk, predicted (and demonstrated to its heart’s content) that any legal limitation of working time would sound the death knell of English industry, an industry that like a vampire had to suck human blood, especially that of children. In the old age, child murder was a mysterious rite of the religion of the moloch, but it was only practiced at particularly ceremonious occasions, maybe once a year, and moreover, the moloch had no special liking for the children of the poor. The struggle over the legal limitation of work-time raged all the more vehemently the more, apart from aroused greed, it as a matter of fact hit upon the great question under dispute, the dispute between the blind rule of the laws of demand and supply, which form the political economy of the middle class, and the control of social production by social insight and foresight that forms the political economy of the working class. The ten-hour-bill was, therefore, not only a great practical achievement; it was the victory of a principle. For the first time, the political economy of the middle class in broad daylight succumbed to the political economy of the working class.”<sup>14</sup>

As the second great bright side of the development since 1848, Marx mentions the cooperative movement that had proven “that production can take place on a grand scale and in accordance with the advance of modern science without the existence of a class of ‘masters’ that uses a class of ‘hands’; that, in order to bear fruit, the means of labour need not be monopolised as means of rule over and means of exploitation against the worker himself and herself, and that, just like slave labour, just like feudal serf labour, *wage labour* is only a passing and subordinated social form, bound to pass before *associated labour* that exercises its work with a willing hand, an active spirit and a happy heart.”<sup>15</sup>

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change in the material standards of life, the economic relationships could be of advantage to it. By the change in the material standards of life, this kind of socialism, however, by no means understands the abolition of the bourgeois relations of production that is only possible in a revolutionary way, but administrative changes that take place on the basis of these relationships of production, meaning do not change anything to the relationship between capital and wage labour, but in the best case reduce the costs of its rule to the bourgeoisie and simplify its state budget.” Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels: Manifesto of the Communist Party. In: *MEW*, vol. 4, p. 489.

<sup>14</sup> Karl Marx: Inaugural address of the International Workers’ Association, in: *Works*, vol. 16, p. 10 f.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11f.

In other words, Marx considered it possible that in the middle of the bloom period of the capitalism of free competition, there could be made to act elements of the “political economy of the labour class” - an economy of “control by social insight and foresight” – as well as beginnings of an alternative way of operating the economy, however restricted that may be, however. Precisely during the Fordist-welfare state capitalism, these tendencies were considerably extended, as a result of hard social and political struggles, before the background of the Great Crisis and two World Wars as well as fascism, in competition with state socialism not last in the domain of the social question.<sup>16</sup> Precisely the retraction of these achievements begs the question, whether they are more or something else than merely one success in remanding capitalism into its “normal” bounds.

At the moment, where social state measures, collective agreements, legal regulations go beyond the elementary guarantee against existential troubles, where the economic relationships are also formed under the aspects of social justice, reduction of social inequality and the strengthening of the power of the dependently employed, long-term social reproductive interests are also imposed against interests of short-term capital utilization, in this moment, tendencies are validated that stand in contradiction to “capital logic”.<sup>17</sup> Let these tendencies be called in the following, in a generalising way, “social logic”. They bring to bear interests of the general realisation of social, cultural, and political human rights.

The implicit adoption of such an idea is that by way of the social and political struggles, by the forced compromises, by temporary understanding also by the rulers, after enormous catastrophes, also elements, structures, tendencies, forums for socialism can emerge in the womb of the old order and that not only as “anti-systemic political movements”. It is time to finally break with the contradiction between the theory-guided disdain vis-à-vis these elements and structures in the existing and the simultaneous practical defence of the same.

At the end of the Second World War, just having escaped to the genocide, and quite marked by the experiences of the “intellectual in emigration”<sup>18</sup>, Theodor W. Adorno wrote: “We owe our lives to the difference between the economic scaffold, late industrial capitalism, and the political façade. The difference is insignificant to theoretical criticism; everywhere, the fake character, for instance, of alleged public opinion, the primacy of the economic can be proven in the actual decisions. For uncounted individuals, however, the thin and ephemeral shell is the whole reason for their existence. Precisely those of whose thought and action there depends change, the only essential, owe their being to the inessential, to appearance, yes to what, according to the measure of the great historical development laws, comes to light as mere accident. However, does this not affect the whole construction of essence and appearance? Measured by the notion, the particular as a matter of fact has become quite as null and void as Hegelian philosophy anticipated it; sub specie

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<sup>16</sup> Compare Christoph Butterwegge: *Krise und Zukunft des Sozialstaates* (Crisis and future of the social state), Wiesbaden: VS – Social Science Publishers 2005.

<sup>17</sup> Let there be understood by *capital logic* all tendencies that follow from the unhindered working of capital utilization interests and the complete subjection of work and society under capital.

<sup>18</sup> Theodor W. Adorno: *Minima Moralia. Reflexionen aus dem beschädigten Leben* (Minima Moralia. Reflections from damaged life), Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag 2001, p. 13.

individuationis<sup>19</sup>, however, the ... suffered, as it were abnormally continued life is itself the essential. The world is a system of horror, but for that reason, he who considers it a system still does it too much honour, because its unifying principle is division, and it reconciles, by imposing the irreconcilability of the general and the particular in its pure form. Its essence is non-essence; its appearance, however, the lie, thanks to which it continues to exist, is the placeholder of the truth.”<sup>20</sup>

Every emancipative social theory should take this turn of the Critical Theory seriously. On the one hand, Adorno accepts the opinion that the society under the capitalist primate of the economy is a closed system and the individual disappears by mere subjection.<sup>21</sup> The general essence, however, can then not even explain the mere survival of people. That is owed to the appearance, “democracy” itself being reduced to mere façade. On the other hand, if from the point of view of the individuals, their survival is the really essential, then also democracy is not only the “placeholder of truth”, but must be integrated into the determination of the essence of society. An emancipative theory should take the real and experienced contradiction between capital logic and social logic in economy and society seriously also from the conceptual point of view and hide it away, in one or the other way, either under the terminology of “capitalism” or that of “social market economy”. This would change, however, the understanding not only of capitalism, but also of socialism face to orthodox Marxism.

Such an approach would finally break with the idea of socialism as the society of a mono-subject, where a single society-wide owner on the basis of centralised, society-wide will formation process disposes of all productive resources. The qualitative leap from capitalism to socialism would be that from an order, where capital utilization (capital logic) dominates, to a social way of development, where the comprehensive realisation of human rights would have become the primary goal of economy and politics (social logic).

The free encyclopaedia *Wikipedia* introduces its article on the keyword *socialism* with the sentence: “*Socialism* designates political and economic theories that favour the production and distribution of services under common or state guidance.”<sup>22</sup> In this determination of the concept, there is being continued uncritically the whole centralised inheritance of the state socialist tradition as it developed in the 19<sup>th</sup>

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<sup>19</sup> That is: from the point of view of the “becoming him- or herself of the person, in whose course the conscience of one’s own individuality or respectively the difference from others increasingly solidifies”. Duden. Das Fremdwörterbuch. Mannheim: Bibliographisches Institut & F.A. Brockhaus 1997, p. 355.

<sup>20</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, opus cit., p. 205 f.

<sup>21</sup> In Herbert Marcuse’s work *The one-dimensional man*, this theory is brought up to its idea – even the most individual still appears only as form of motion of a capitalist totality, complete freedom as the most absolute and, at the same time, joyful subjugation: “The scope of reach of socially acceptable and desirable satisfaction increases considerable; but in the course of this satisfaction, the joy principle is reduced, robbed of those claims that are incompatible with existing society. Adapted in this way, joy produces subjection.” Herbert Marcuse: *Der eindimensionale Mensch. Studien zur Ideologie der fortgeschrittenen Industriegesellschaft (One-dimensional man. Studies on the ideology of progressive industrial society)*. Darmstadt und Neuwied: Luchterhand 1982, p. 95. Only from the ostracised and the marginalised, the unemployed and those incapable of working, there could still be expected “revolutionary opposition” (just there, p. 267).

<sup>22</sup> <http://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sozialismus>. In this way, socialism is of necessity moved into the proximity of all authoritarian orders.

century mainly in Germany. Socialism is not defined by way of its goals, but by the dominance of – disputed mean, the “common or state guidance”. From here it is only a step towards characterising socialism as an order, determined by the comprehensive, centralised disposal over the whole productive wealth of society (“social property of the means of production”). While state socialism belongs to the history of socialism, it would be very wrong to identify socialism for ever with this special form.

Without reconstructing here the historical discussions in socialism and communism<sup>23</sup>, let there be pointed at least to the inner contradictions of the original approaches. They always aim at the redemption of the liberty claims of the Great French Socialism, at the human rights redeemable for everybody (also for the lowest strata, who do not dispose of any property, the “fourth cast” of society). They linked the freedom rights with the social question, formal equality with real equality, self-realization with solidarity. And in order to get there, very different means were proposed, where from the beginning on, there opposed one another the Communist approach of a centrally administered economy and the socialist approach of free associations cooperating on a solidary basis.<sup>24</sup> Marxism combined both approaches in the form of unresolved antinomies, and in this way, could serve as a point of reference simultaneously for a Bolshevik dictatorship as well as for a democratic socialism. The question to what extent a centralised disposition over property, a society-wide planned economy could really result in “the free development of each and everyone becoming the condition of the free development of all”, precisely in the Communist tradition was not seriously investigated.

For Marx, “Communist society” (the difference between socialism and Communism shall not be dealt with here in detail) was the only one, “where the original and free development of the individual is not a phrase”. Such a society required (1) certain “economic pre-conditions”, (2) the “necessary solidarity of the free development of all” and (3) the “universal activity of the individuals on the basis

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<sup>23</sup> Compare on that the systematic contribution: Zur Programmatik der Partei des Demokratischen Sozialismus. Ein Kommentar (On the programmatic thoughts in the Party of Democratic Socialism. A comment), Berlin: Dietz Publishers, 1997.

<sup>24</sup> Thus it says in Babeuf: “There is no more important truth than the one already adduced by us that a philosopher (Morelly – M.B.) announced by the following words: *Chat as much as you want about the best form of government, you won't be able to achieve anything, as long as you have not destroyed the seeds of greed and ambition.* Therefore, the social institutions must be structured in such a way as to take the hope from anyone to ever become by his education richer, mightier, or nobler than his fellowman... The only means to get to that goal consists in introducing a *common administration*; to abolish private property; to let every man exercise the things he understands best; obligate him to deliver the fruit of his labour into the common granary in natura; and to introduce a simple administration of distribution, which takes stock of every person or thing, and lets the latter be distributed in most painstaking equality and be delivered in the apartment of every citizen.” Gracchus Babeuf: Manifest der Plebejer (Manifesto of the Plebeians) , in: Joachim Höppner, Waltraud Seidel-Höppner: *Von Babeuf bis Blanqui* (From Babeuf to Blanqui), vol. 2, Texts. Leipzig: Reclam Universal Bibliothek 1975, p. 79f. The Saint-Simonists, by contrast, to mention one of the socialist tendencies, strove for a “*universal association*”, for relations, “where all human forces are harmonically linked to one another”. The Saint-Simonist teaching, in: Just there, p. 153. A Central Bank system, the principle of distribution of work according to the capabilities and the results according to performance belonged into the mix. Diversity was the point of departure, its solidary blossoming was the means for the free development of all.



of the available means of production.”<sup>25</sup> To that end, Marx wrote one-and-a-half decades later that the social conditions of production had to be transformed into an “organic social body”, “where the individuals reproduce themselves not as individuals, but as social individuals.”<sup>26</sup>

On the basis of these premises, socialism cannot be thought of as the resolution of the tension between individuality and sociality (tending either towards centralized sociality in the state socialist or towards individuality in the anarchist tradition). *Socialism is, so we hypothesize, the process of mediation, where the free development of each and everyone is the point of departure and the end point, and the solidary development of all the means, a means with high value in itself.* If this is so, then it has to be asked, what practical process after the failure of state socialism can redeem the two following objectives of socialist movements of emancipation: (1) “The modern, universal process cannot be subsumed differently under the individuals than by being subsumed under all.”<sup>27</sup> (2) “With the appropriation of the total forces of production by the associated individuals, private property stops.”<sup>28</sup>

A reconstruction of the Marxist conception of socialist property had brought this author, in the middle of the 80s, to the insight: “Individual property on the basis of highest socialisation, individual appropriation mediated by collective and social forms of ownership of the common means of or production, individual freedom, whose conditions is conscious social dominance of the production forces – by these words one could characterise essential corner stones of the Marxian understanding of socialism/Communism.”<sup>29</sup> However, what is the content of individual property under the conditions of social production, what forms of property can guarantee it, and how can the social production process be ruled in such a conscious way that it comes to the solidary development of all?

In the context with the programmatic discussions of the PDS, the author developed, together with Dieter Klein, André Brie, Michael Chrapa, Rainer Land, Judith Dellheim and others the conception that the goal of socialism and, in this sense, the goal of its property relations, is the free development of the individuals, The social production and distribution process, its way of accumulation and regulation, the entirety of its relationships of ownership and disposal is socially fashioned, according to this thesis, if it is oriented towards the production and reproduction of those goods (“freedom goods”) that make possible this free development and that each and everyone may freely appropriate (this demands an active process).<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels: Die deutsche Ideologie (The German Ideology), *MEW*, vol. 3, p. 242 f.

<sup>26</sup> Karl Marx: Grundrisse zur Kritik der politischen Ökonomie (Basic Outlines on the Criticism of political Economy), *MEW*, vol. 42, p. 723.

<sup>27</sup> Karl Marx und Friedrich Engels: Die Deutsche Ideologie (German Ideology), opus cit., p. 68.

<sup>28</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>29</sup> Michael Brie: *Wer ist Eigentümer im Sozialismus* (Who is the owner under socialism?), Berlin: Dietz Verlag 1989, p. 106.

<sup>30</sup> Michael Brie: Sozialismus und Eigentum (Socialism and property), in: The same (ed.): Mit Marx ins 21. Jahrhundert. Kritik des Neoliberalismus und Alternativen. Beiträge zum Symposium der Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung vom 1. Juni 2005 (With Marx into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Criticism of neoliberalism and

By individual property as the central objective of socialist production and reproduction, there could be understood the free and self-determined appropriation of these basic goods by each man and woman that is impossible without a conscious regulation of the entirety of the relationships of production and distribution. If the basic form of motion of capital is the motion M (money) – C (commodity) – P (production) – C' (new commodity enriched by value added) – M' (money wealth augmented by profit), the general formula of socialist reproduction would be the one that departs from the individuals and arrives at further developed individuals, enriched by new needs, enjoyments, relations etc. For a process of production and reproduction, not dominated by profit, but by the free development of each and everyone (woman or man) public goods and services are at least no less important than the production of goods. It would be characterised by the motion: I (individuals) – FG (freedom goods) and other goods necessary for their production (only partly in commodity form) – P (production) – FG' (extended reproduction of freedom goods and the other goods necessary for their reproduction) – I' (further developed individuals).

However, what does that mean for the new formulation of the property question? In the party programme of the Left Party.PDS, there was decided the following position in 2003: “The alternative to capitalist property, therefore, is not all-encompassing state property but the democratic decision over the social basic processes and the encouragement of those property forms that allow the best possible level of efficient offer and just distribution of the human basic goods. All forms of property – cooperative, community, private, state, and other – that develop the natural, social, and cultural basics of life and facilitate the access to the basic conditions for human life shall be promoted, others that undermine, destroy or hamper or hinder this access, shall be pushed back and gradually eliminated.” The struggle for socialism is an economic and political order that guarantees the material and institutional conditions for the comprehensive redemption of human rights. Socialism, according to its essence, is the universal human rights movement of modernity.<sup>31</sup>

From such a position, there follow a number of conclusions: It prefers production and ownership reform that make possible real individual and collective influence, in so far it concerns people's life situations; it envisages the common social disposal in particular in the solidary setting of rules for individual and collective economic actions, in the privileging of certain orientations (socio-ecological restructuring) and the repression and/or suppression of other orientations. The “embedding” or markets into this framework, the orientation of entrepreneurial action along these goals by way of the means of structure and regional policy, credit allocation, co-determination etc., the encouragement of innovations that serve these goals, the conversion of co-determination and co-ownership of the employed into means for the shaping of

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alternatives. Contributions to the symposium of the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation of June 1, 2005), Rosa Luxemburg Foundation 2006, p. 77-102.

<sup>31</sup> “The political claim of socialism consists in such a shaping of modern societies with their institutions and power structures that the imposition of human rights in the unity of political, social, and individual rights and their indivisibility are guaranteed for each and every one. In this sense, socialism can also be called the human rights ideology of modern societies.” On the programme of the Party of Democratic Socialism, opus cit., p. 49. For the theoretical justification, see also: Michael Brie, Michael Chrapa, and Dieter Klein: *Sozialismus als Tagesaufgabe* ( Socialism as the order of the day), Karl Dietz Publishers, Berlin 2002, English version in *Suffering* (opus cit.), e-book, rlf, 2005-06.

production processes and for the development of the employed are the primary means. Not the centralised order of top-down cooperation but the de-centralised self-organisation in autonomous networks within democratically set frameworks of solidary economic management is the structuring guiding idea. State and supra-state action then aims mainly at the implementation of these rules.<sup>32</sup>

As Bischoff et al. write: “In this context, it cannot be a matter of striving, in a directive manner, towards a permanent organisation and intervention of the state or of the public institutions, but of creating, by way of democratising, indirect steering and a new system of social security, the general conditions for the unfolding of the self-guided activity of the subjects.”<sup>33</sup> In this way, the etatist understanding of socialism will be replaced by a libertarian vision of socialism.<sup>34</sup> On the most diverse fields, regulated markets, self-administration, democratic participation, collective self-provision in particular with human person-oriented services etc. become essential socialisation forms of this kind of socialism.

### **Second objection: Only a revolution can solve the basic problems**

Since now, as compared to orthodox Marxism, the ideas of capitalism as well as socialism ought to be changed, so should also the ideas about the transition from one to the other. The Marxist conception of revolution as well as that of the Marxist reformers has been marked by the guiding idea of centralisation and concentration. From the “Manifesto” passing by “Capital” to “Development of socialism from Utopia to science”, Bebel’s “Woman and socialism”, or Lenin’s “The threatening catastrophe” and “State and Revolution”, there always stands the thought in the foreground that it was the tendency of capitalism to concentrate production just as the working class in ever larger units, so that the economic managerial anarchism that is produced by private property, entered into an unsolvable contradiction to the social management of enterprises. The socialist revolution, in whose wake all means of production would be concentrated in one hand, then seemed to be nothing more but the fulfilment of this tendency to centralisation. In the ideal case, the whole economy was supposed to be regulated, like the German postal service back then (Lenin) as a unified enterprise or factory. The difference was only, whether this was to happen on the way of revolution or that of the reform.

It is time to reconvert the revolutionary mechanics of dogmatic Marxism finally into the lively transformation dynamic of a libertarian socialism that wins its force from the liberation of people from relationships that to them have become fetters to their own development. To that end, social productive forces just as productive forces have to be understood simultaneously as forces and relationships of human development and recognition or, as Marx writes: “The relationship of the productive forces to the

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<sup>32</sup> Internationally, there are very different approaches to formulating a new socialism as a convincing alternative to neoliberal high-tech capitalism. To the few who tried that with a certain radiation, there belongs István Mészáros: *Beyond Capital*, London 1995.

<sup>33</sup> Joachim Bischoff; Hasko Hüning; Christoph Lieber: *Von der neoliberalen zur sozialistischen Gouvernementalität. Anforderungen an eine Rifondazione der Linke (From neoliberal to socialist governmentality. Demands from a rifondazione of the Left)*, ms., p. 15.

<sup>34</sup> In its consequence, this requires a lifting (‘Aufhebung’) of the libertarian heritage – ranging from the US- American “founding fathers” of the constitution and Mill to the theories of von Hayek or neo-institutionalism – by socialism.

form of circulation is the relationship of the form of circulation to the activity or confirmation of the individuals.”<sup>35</sup>

This, however, requires no more and no less than a complete revision of the orthodox Marxist philosophy of history that tended to seeing in capitalism the highest and sharpest form of exploitation, still transcending all pre-capitalist formations in its alienated, factual cruelty. As developed at another place, however, the “great epochs of economic social formation” (Marx) in their tendency are steps of successive liberation, as limited as this may have been to certain social groups, and even if it went hand in hand with new exploitation. The respectively higher form of production of wealth, where certain societies impose themselves over others, at the same time produces a higher productivity and development of individuality, however unequally it may be distributed from a social point of view. They are therefore not only economically stronger, but also have a higher cultural radiation. They are steps of world-historical emancipation.

On the basis of Marx, the *formation-theoretical criterion of progress* can be determined as follows: Progressive are societies that face to others enable/or force a higher productivity, by bringing about a higher degree of freedom of individual development and a higher degree of its transformation in social development of social productive development. That depends, *first of all*, on the relationships of property and power that define the distribution of the social functions of the production of human freedom.<sup>36</sup> *Second*, this is conditioned by the *forms of socialisation* that determine the form of exchange of wealth. The condition is, *thirdly*, in each case that neither the socialisation, nor the power and property structures undermine<sup>37</sup> the “fountains of all wealth...: soil and the worker”<sup>38</sup>

A socialist transformation must drive ahead this world-historical tendency of emancipation and should not, like Soviet state-party socialism, fall back behind the already achieved potentials of bourgeois-capitalist societies. Magnus Marsdal clarifies this position in the following scheme<sup>39</sup>:

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<sup>35</sup> Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels: *The German Ideology*, opus cit., p. 71.

<sup>36</sup> Productive relationships as relationships of property are relationships of distribution of socially produced means of production. As Marx writes, with respect to antagonistic formations: “Those relationships of distribution are... the bases of special social functions that within the production process itself fall to certain agents of the same in contrast to the immediate producers.” Karl Marx: *Das Kapital. Dritter Band (Capital. Third Volume)*, *MEW*, vol. 25, p. 886.

<sup>37</sup> Compare Michael Brie: *Der sowjetische Staatsparteisozialismus im Lichte der Marxschen Theorie ‚progressiver Epochen der ökonomischen Gesellschaftsformation‘* (Soviet State Party Socialism in the light of the Marxist theory of ‘progressive eras of economic social formations’), in: Kalbe, Ernstgert; Geier, Wolfgang, Politt, Holger (ed.): *Aufstieg und Fall des Staatssozialismus: Ursachen und Wirkung (Rise and fall of state socialism: Causes and effects)*, IIIrd Rosa-Luxemburg-Conference of the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation (Saxony), Leipzig Yearbooks: Osteuropa in Tradition und Wandel (Eastern Europe Tradition and Change); English version in: *Suffering*, an e-book of translations, rlf, 2005-06.

<sup>38</sup> Karl Marx: *Das Kapital. Erster Band (Capital. First Volume)*, *MEW*, vol. 23, p. 530.

<sup>39</sup> Magnus Marsdal: *Sozialistischer Individualismus*, in: *Utopie kreativ*, Issue 2/2005 ([http://www.rosalux.de/cms/fileadmin/rls\\_uploads/pdfs/Marsdal\\_SozialistischerIndividualismus\\_d.pdf](http://www.rosalux.de/cms/fileadmin/rls_uploads/pdfs/Marsdal_SozialistischerIndividualismus_d.pdf)).

### Graph 1: The Scheme of Socialism



Such a conception of the real potency of historical progress makes it apparent that socialism is part of a comprehensive historical process of the struggle for emancipation, which started in the 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> century and had important stages in the great bourgeois revolutions and reform movements as well as in the struggles of the workers' movement, the women's movement, the anti-slavery and anti-racism movement, in peace and ecological movements. It is a process that orients itself positively towards growing liberty and equality. It assumes socialist dimensions, where, by the conscious fashioning of social production and reproductive conditions, it pushes back profit dominance and repressive statehood and strives for the elimination of its rule over the life of the people. Socialist policy seeks to fashion a process of transformation that distinguishes itself equally of traditional reform as well as of orthodox revolutionary understanding (Table 1).

Rosa Luxemburg had brought the contrast of revolution and reform to the point in this way: "And socialism itself, to some, results from the conquest of political power by the proletariat and from a complete social upheaval, for the others, it is the result of unnoticeable shifts in the womb of capitalist enterprise and the bourgeois ministry."<sup>40</sup> A transformation strategy takes, from the thought of socialist reform policy, essential elements of an active policy of shaping contemporary societies and the extension of emancipative achievement; of a revolutionary approach, it adopts the idea of an inevitable break with the dominance of capitalist private property and the revolution of the power relations linked to that.

This understanding of transformation of the new left is being developed in very different contexts. Exemplary for this understanding are mainly the World Social Forum, the Latin American left parties united in the São Paulo Forum or the European Left Party. In the latter, the notion of transformation has become the

<sup>40</sup> Rosa Luxemburg: Zum französischen Einigungskongress (On the French unity congress), in: *Works*, vol. 1.2, p. 91.

guiding notion of a fundamental change pointing beyond capitalism.<sup>41</sup> In the German discussion, the position linked to that was developed systematically in another place.<sup>42</sup>

**Table 1: Reform, Revolution, Transformation – a comparison of categories**

	<b>Reform</b>	<b>Old understanding of revolution</b>	<b>Transformation</b>
<i>Basic notion of contemporary society</i>	Market economy	Capitalism	Capital-dominated society M – C – P – C' – M'
<i>Notion of change</i>	Changed regulation of the given	Total break	Comprehensive democratisation and extension of non-capitalist elements, tendencies and areas as well as non-capitalist overall regulation
<i>Overarching objective of change</i>	Civilising of contemporary societies while maintaining capital dominance	Radical social breach with the totality of the conditions of contemporary societies and the construction of a society of common property	Democratic self-administration and free development of each and every one as the condition of the free development of all
<i>Economic objective of change</i>	Social market economy	Socially-oriented state economy	Development and extension of the areas of a solidary economy and subordination of capital utilization under socio-ecological goals: I – FG – P – FG' – I'
<i>Regulatory pattern aimed for</i>	Market dominance and social-state regulation	Centralised planned economy	Dominance of social objectives (setting of general framework), primacy of social basic rights, preference for local and regional economies (de-globalisation)
<i>Main advantage over pure capitalism</i>	Higher degree of equality, democracy, and civilisation	Centralised control over all areas of life and, in this way, prevention of crises and catastrophe	Higher degree of individual self-determination and transformation of the same into solidary development of all by way of conscious setting of a framework
<i>Basic values</i>	Basic rights of equal participation following the conditions of a capital-dominated society	Equality within the common economic order	Equal access to the freedom goods: self-determination and social security in a solidary order

<sup>41</sup> Compare on that the programmatic founding document of the EL: <http://www.european-left.org/about/introduction/extendeddocument.2005-06-30.0350004084> or the principles of the World Social Forum: <http://weltsozialforum.org/prinzipien/index.html>.

<sup>42</sup> Michael Brie "Freedom and Socialism" in Michael Brie, Michael Chrapa and Dieter Klein: Socialism as the order of the day, Dietz 2002, English version in *Suffering* (opus cit.).

<i>Relationship to capital utilisation</i>	Social regulation of capital utilization	Elimination of capital utilization and imposition of a pure social economy	Overcoming of the dominance of capital utilization over economy and society (primacy of social logic over capital logic)
<i>Relationship to Property</i>	Social obligation of property	Etatisation of property	De-commodification of the freedom goods including labour; extension of cooperative forms especially in the area of existential provision; subjection of private property of the means of production under social objectives
<i>Social force of Change</i>	Alliance of the organised gainfully employed and reform-oriented forces of capital	Workers (and peasants)	Centre-Bottom project
<i>Most important form of political action</i>	Negotiations on the basis of an independent trade union and party power (corporatism)	Preparation of one's own organization and of the masses for revolution	Building up of a broad network (economic, social, political, cultural) as the basis of resistance, one's own determining of policies, and of negotiations
<i>Understanding of Democracy</i>	Representative democracy	People's power, exercised by an avant-garde	Participative democracy and of the basic right of a self-determined life
<i>Relationship to Globalisation</i>	Global governance	Socialist internationalism on the basis of the coincidence of interests among all the exploited	Combination of de-globalisation and alternative rules of global solidarity cooperation
<i>Peace policy</i>	Civilising of the great power and imposition of an international legal order controlled by them	Elimination of the origins of wars by the abolition of capitalism	De-militarization, overcoming of poverty, exclusion, foreign domination in the framework of a transformation strategy

### **Third Objection: The state is only instrument of the economically ruling class**

The *third objection* against the participation of socialist and Communist parties in governments was formulated as follows by Rosa Luxemburg: "While the Parliament forms an organ of the class and fraction struggles within bourgeois society, and therefore the most appropriate terrain for the systematic resistance of the socialists against the rule of the bourgeoisie, this role is excluded to begin with for the workers' representatives in the government."<sup>43</sup> She offers the following justification for that: "Called upon to realise the ready result of the party struggles fought in the Parliament and in the country, central power is mainly an organ for action, whose capability for

<sup>43</sup> Rosa Luxemburg: Die sozialistische Krise in Frankreich (The socialist crisis in France), in: Works, vol. 1.2, p. 58.

life relies on its inner homogeneity.”<sup>44</sup> The government of a national state to her represents a whole that was only the political organisation of capitalist economy” and between whose “single functions”, there reigned “full harmony”.<sup>45</sup> Since the individual functions of the government were inseparably intertwined among them, there existed a “solidary responsibility of its individual members”<sup>46</sup>, and it was a “completely Utopian plan... to think that one branch could conduct bourgeois, another socialist policy, and the central power could, in this way, be conquered for the working class bit by bit or branch after branch.”<sup>47</sup>

Rosa Luxemburg qualifies this idea at least to that extent that she wants to see the participation of the socialists in organs of community self-administration be treated differently: “While the government incorporates centralised state power, the municipality grows out of local self-administration *at the expense* of central power, as *liberation* from central power. Whereas in the case of the government, the specific means of bourgeois class rule: militarism, cults, trade policy, foreign policy make up its actual essence, the municipality is called upon specifically to carry out *cultural* and *economic* tasks; that means tasks corresponding to the administrative mechanisms of the socialist society, which does not know any class divisions. Central government and community are, therefore, two historically opposed poles in today’s society. The permanent struggle between municipality and the government, between the *maires* and the prefects in France are the concrete expression of this historical contradiction.”<sup>48</sup>

Yet, there not only exists the contradiction between central government and localities (who after all participate directly in the implementation of the laws and orders of the central government), but within *all* specialised organs of state power. The reason for that lies already in the character of the capitalist economy itself. As explained earlier, it is in my opinion a misjudgement to depart from a homogenous economy that is nothing else but capitalist. It is the dominance of capital utilisation over all other forms that make up a capitalist economy. This is, however, in no way identical to the economy being nothing but capital utilization. It is as Marx so brilliantly exposed in “Capital”, a battle field between capital and labour in its various fractions and groups. Constantly, other interests are opposed to the dominant interest in capital utilisation and defended – interests in better work conditions just as in higher salaries, environmental protection, regional development etc. etc. Capital utilisation imposes itself in the reproduction of a capitalist economy against other tendencies and at the same time as the dominant tendency closely interwoven with the others. The competition among the communities for investors is only one example, how especially there, where there are the least society-wide steering

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<sup>44</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>45</sup> Just there, p. 59. She extrapolates further. “In this sense, the central government of a modern state represents a cog works, whose individual parts seize one on the other from all sides, and mutually determine and regulate their movements. The direct transmission mechanism that gets the whole cog works into gear is the bourgeois parliament, but the driving force in that are at first the class and party relations in the country, and in the last line – the production and exchange relationships of the social economy. To the capitalist unity of the economy here, there corresponds the bourgeois unity of governmental policy.” Ibidem.

<sup>46</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>47</sup> Just there.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., p. 60.



mechanisms, the dominance of capital utilisation imposes itself in a particular direct way and significantly determines any local self-administration in its actions.

The inner contradictions of the economies with capitalist structures find their political form of motion in the structure of the capitalistically marked state. Quite in contrast to Rosa Luxemburg, Nicos Poulantzas states that “within the state” the contradictions between the fractions of the dominant classes “assume the forms of internal contradictions between the different branches and apparatuses”.<sup>49</sup> Because the state works on class compromises in order to enable the cohesion of a society split by class contradictions<sup>50</sup>, it is also a field of social struggle in the action of its executive. It is by no means accidental that in Centre-Left governments often the finance ministry and the Central Bank are manned by persons, who are part of the establishment of the neoliberal block, while for other sectors of the executive, there are also employed actors who are close to the trade unions or the social movements. That would not be necessary if the executive was necessarily homogenous. The expulsion of Lafontaine from the Schröder government was a required step to make the exacerbation of neoliberal politics in Germany under Red-Green even possible. The state is at the same time focus of crystallisation as well as terrain of social conflicts and struggles.<sup>51</sup>

The Left, therefore, also does not stand opposed to the state like a beleaguering army that has no influence whatsoever on the garrison of the besieged fortress. No doubt, their struggles are enormously influenced by the state, its legal, institutional, cultural form, as any observer of different national left cultures can recognise. That also means that the struggle to democratise and socialise the state itself has to be picked up ever again in a new way. Joachim Hirsch names two basic tendencies of the bourgeois state that in their function are adequate to the conservation of profit dominance in economy and society: (1) The preference of social “practices (bureaucracy, parties, electoral modus, representation, legal system) that confirm and enshrine the *isolation and the relegation to single status* of capitalist socialisation”<sup>52</sup>; (2) prevention of the reconciliation of the gaps among the ruled and creation of unity in the ruling classes, in particular by the relative autonomy and contradictory unity of the system of state apparatuses and their limited insulation from social influences; (3) the renunciation to instruments for putting profit dominance seriously into question; (4) the articulation of the state personnel as special stratum, and (5) the systemically conditioned dependence of the state on taxes, whose mustering depends on the relatively undisturbed process of capital utilisation. In each of these fields, the Left is asked to formulate alternatives and to transfer them into the reform of the state, its economic, political, legal, and cultural basis.

The Left, therefore, must fight for a change of the state form by which the mentioned and other rule-securing institutions and structures guarding the dominance of capital utilisation in an emancipative way without, in the process, destroying the achievements of modern economy and politics. Neoliberalism has

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<sup>49</sup> Nicos Poulantzas: *Staatstheorie* (State theory), Hamburg 1978, p. 123.

<sup>50</sup> The same: *Klassen im Kapitalismus* (Classes in capitalism). Berlin (West) 1975, p. 138.

<sup>51</sup> The same *State Theory*, opus cit., p. 117 ff.

<sup>52</sup> Joachim Hirsch: *Kapitalismus ohne Alternative? Materialistische Geschichtstheorie und Möglichkeiten einer sozialistischen Politik heute* (Capitalism without alternative? Materialist theory of history and possibilities for a socialist policy today), Hamburg: VSA Publishers 1990, p. 45.

proven how decisive the struggle for public services, the way and quantity of the levying of taxes, the constitution of the State Bank etc. is for forcing a change in orientation of politics. A central project of the Left born in Brazil is the transfer from the monopoly of the parliament on the budget to the participative citizens' budget.<sup>53</sup> The basic reform of the rendering of public services as part of the production of local participative and solidary spaces must occupy a central place on the agenda of the Left. A transformation politics, which starts off from the contemporary contradictions and leads beyond them, must also carry this struggle into the state itself. That way the state does not become the only, yes, not even the most essential space – that is and remains civil society and the struggle for hegemony in it –, but who leaves it aside, will get to feel the power of the state, without having used the available possibilities for changing it.

#### **Fourth objection: Governmental participation weakens the Left**

A fourth objection holds that only outside the government, something could be changed. Governmental participation necessarily weakens. As Rosa Luxemburg writes: “However, far from rendering impossible practical, hands-on successes, direct reforms of a progressive character, fundamental opposition for any minority party in general, in particular, however, for the socialist one, are the only effective means to achieve practical successes.”<sup>54</sup> It was possible to wield concessions from the bourgeois majority only in three ways: “to offer by their furthest-reaching demands a dangerous competition to the bourgeois parties and to push them forward by the pressure of the electoral masses; then, to expose the government to the country and to the influence by public opinion; finally, to group, by their criticism within and outside of the Chamber, the popular masses ever more closely around them and, in this way, grow into a respect-inspiring power which government and the bourgeoisie have to count with.”<sup>55</sup>

Governmental participation, following Rosa Luxemburg, makes criticism of the government and thus enlightenment of the masses impossible, resulted in their being made compromises at any prices, and in this way, delivered the Left to the bourgeois majority and weakens the extra-parliamentary force of the same, so that not more, but much less would be achieved than from the opposition benches.

Correct in Rosa Luxemburg's presentation is certainly that a form of governmental participation that fixates the autonomous forces of the government and suppresses all other forms of action, that renounces to public exposition of the contradictions of this participation and the analysis of the given framework and constraints, stifles the thorn of the spur to action instead of kindling it, and goes into the trap of being pocketed. Yet is this unavoidable?

The most important conditions to escape from this trap of any governmental participation is the strength of the Left outside of state institution, its power as social movements and emancipative organisations of social interests of the subaltern social

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<sup>53</sup> See on that the very informative website that contains very many additional texts and also introduces more theoretical ones: <http://www.brangsch.de/haushalt.htm>.

<sup>54</sup> Rosa Luxemburg: Die sozialistische Krise in Frankreich (The socialist crisis in France), opus cit., p. 32.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid., p. 33.

classes as well as solidarily inclined middle strata. Parties ultimately can only be really strong left forces within such a left and not as its monopolistic representatives.<sup>56</sup>

Karl Liebknecht expressed this as follows in 1918: “If the entry into parliamentary opposition is the only arrow that a party – for instance, the governmental socialists – has in its quiver, it may be understood that it wants to hold it back, because by taking it out, it will immediately be check-mated. It is only too bad that this is also known to the government and to anyone not fallen on his head. From there, it follows that by way of the transition to parliamentary opposition nothing serious will be achieved, yes that all attempts to that regularly end with the would-be speculators being defeated. Even if one only wants to reach parliamentary successes, everything depends on parliamentary opposition not being the last, but only the first, not the strongest, but the weakest, not the end, but the beginning, that the party has an extra-parliamentary power behind itself that it is capable and decided, in spite of all defeats, to throw in inexhaustible variety and quick-wittedness of methods with ever increasing energy into battle and on how this is being demonstrated to the adversary by the deed. In a different way, neither respect nor success is achieved in the political – also the parliamentary! – arena. This tactic, however, leads at best a Scheidemann on the post of the John on the Imperial coach seat.”<sup>57</sup>

The strength or the weakness of the extra-parliamentary Left is not directly dependent on left political parties,<sup>58</sup> but they can contribute to that. They can (1) turn the direct, solidary, even if by no means uncritical cooperation on the basis of an intensive dialogue into a strongpoint of their strategy; (2) develop common projects for supporting one another in extra- as well as inner-parliamentary conflicts up to and including legislative projects; (3) find forms of personal integration (especially on electoral lists of the Left); (4) invest resources to strengthen the extra-parliamentary forces in common that are always discriminated in comparison to parties. (5) Important is also the common struggle against policies hostile to trade unions and legislation as well as the other way around for new legal regulations that strengthen civil society forces and organisation in particular of the subaltern forces in order to

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<sup>56</sup> In an analysis of governmental participation of the socialist Left of Norway, Dag Seierstad comes to the conclusion that the strength of the left in government has to do above all with the action of the trade unions as well as also the alternative social movements: “The two main factors behind the electoral success in 2005 are nevertheless of importance also in other countries: a trade union movement attacking the policies of the social democratic party from the left – and the existence of a sufficiently strong party to the left of the social democrats identifying to a great extent with the demands of the trade union movement.” Dag Seierstad: *The recent development of the Norwegian left: Challenges and prospects*. Contribution at the workshop of the rlf: *Actors in upheaval – transformation processes of left parties*, Berlin from 16 to 18 December 2005.

<sup>57</sup> Karl Liebknecht: *Gesammelte Reden und Schriften (Collected Speeches and Writings)*, vol. IX, Dietz Verlag 1982, p. 462.

<sup>58</sup> Critics of governmental participation often pretend that the extra-parliamentary forces are strong and can be mobilised at any time and were hampered in that primarily by the left parties in government. However, often, high electoral successes of left parties stand or fall due to a low capability for mobilisation by left actors and especially by the large number of the women and men citizens together, or if even left organisations lapse in their mobilisation because they trust in left-wing governments and look for the way of consensus behind closed doors in order not to expose their governmental partners in addition to the confrontation with the Right to yet additional public conflicts.

reduce the disequilibrium in action in this way.<sup>59</sup> The party-political left in government should, therefore, in no way restrict themselves to this one role<sup>60</sup>, and the extra-parliamentary Left shall not subordinate itself to the logic of representations.

This has consequences for the character of left politics as Joachim Hirsch already objected in 1990 against Red-Green: “Social-democratic’ as well as ‘green’ state reformism remains necessary component of a ‘radical reformism’ insofar as it secures scopes for action and conditions for social changes and brings to bear their effect, meaning the shifting of social relationships of force in the state power apparatus. But it does not *create* these changes. Politics that reduces itself to party and state has renounced, to start with, to social-revolutionary claims. Decisive importance is, therefore, assumed by the *practical* approaches and forms of alternative political and social action autonomous vis-à-vis the institutions of the capitalist apparatus of rule.”<sup>61</sup> However, also 15 years later, the real successes are slim.

The decisive question is no doubt, how the Left as a whole can be developed into a hegemonic force, which is in a position to integrate its own party-political formations (within or outside of governments) and to subordinate them to the overall strategy. Left parties in that context have to reflect mainly their privileged position and the suction of integration that departs from the parliamentary system and develop own strategies to actively counteract them – to the inside as well as to the outside. The culture of critical-solidary cooperation is the sine qua non for that.<sup>62</sup>

### **Fifth Objection: The Left only makes the continuation of right-wing policy possible by its governmental participation**

Rosa Luxemburg, around the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, had raised a fifth objection to any governmental participation of the left: “The ministry of Millerands means..., far from inaugurating a new era of social reforms in France, the stop of the fight of the working class for social reforms before it has even started, that means the stifling of that element that solely could infuse a healthy modern life to the ossified French social policy.”<sup>63</sup> And over hundred years later, it says with view to the Lula

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<sup>59</sup> „Left parties must ... systematically counteract their advantage in power face to other formations (of the Left – M.B.). They must share power. Cooperation with movements and the environment of the party is a one-way street, if these are not provided with influence on decisions to which the party has access on the basis of its privileges. Movements and environment will not support left parties, if they receive no guarantees that the corresponding party will take into account the positions of the movement also after the election.” Christoph Spehr: Movement, Formation, Party. Forms of the Political Today, in: Michael Brie, Cornelia Hildebrandt (eds.): For another Europe: Left Parties in the Upswing, an e-book of translation, rls 2005.

<sup>60</sup> The PDS government in Berlin actually had to learn first that governmental participation at the regional level in no way required the abstention of the regional ministers from participations against a government-level visit by George W. Bush. On occasion of the actions against the Hartz IV, they were on the streets then.

<sup>61</sup> Joachim Hirsch: Kapitalismus ohne Alternative? (Capitalism without alternative?), Hamburg: VSA Publishers 1990, p. 193.

<sup>62</sup> Compare: Michael Brie: Die Linke im Konflikt (The left in conflict), in: Neues Deutschland of February 25, 2006.

<sup>63</sup> Rosa Luxemburg: Die sozialistische Krise in Frankreich (The socialist crisis in France), opus cit., p. 57.

government in Brazil: “All macroeconomic instruments of intervention had long been ceded – but the economic crisis made it necessary to seek for a larger social consensus. With a government led by the traditional right in Brazil, this was excluded. There threatened upheaval and government failure like in Argentina or Bolivia. There, the confidence capital of the Workers’ Party and of its candidate came in handy to be able to recycle neoliberal policies.”<sup>64</sup>

Left parties come into office mostly in two situations: Firstly, it can come to constellations, where a de facto alliance (Centre-Left alliance) forms between a dominant social-democratic grouping and left forces that has the goal to defeat a right-wing neoliberalism (often in particularly parasitic forms) or to prevent it. In such a constellation, the tendency to continue to pursue the programme of neoliberalism in economic policy, and modifications are made, especially in the area of democracy, international cooperation, the respect of human rights, and – very partially – social policy. Second, after a de-legitimation also of the moderate social-democratic neoliberalism (real or foreseeable electoral defeat as a signal), broad strata of the population from the centre and the bottom of society may come to prefer a clearly left option, and political forces may recognise in the representation (and implementation) of the expectations from a change of political direction linked to that their long-term strategic chance.<sup>65</sup>

As the case of Venezuela shows, a Centre-Left alliance can break apart in crises and open up the way for a more consequent anti-neoliberal policy.<sup>66</sup> In both cases, it holds: Left governmental policy in many ways has to do with facts and framework conditions that neoliberalism has installed for the duration.<sup>67</sup> Therefore, quick changes especially in the core area of economic and social policy are impossible. Left-wing government policy, if it wants to quit the framework of neoliberalism, must – on the basis of this general framework – and by their gradual change only create the regional, national, and international pre-conditions of a solidary, democratic transformation. There is last but not least a contradiction between growing social

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<sup>64</sup> Luis Fernando Novoa: Lulas Brief an die Banken (Lula’s letter to the banks), in: Friday of January 1, 2006 (<http://www.freitag.de/2006/01/06010301.php>).

<sup>65</sup> Apparently also Wolfgang Fritz Haug hopes for that when he writes about the new Left Party: “In the interplay with – and mainly driven by – the ‘social movement of movements’, it could change the relationship of forces in a way that would also bring social democracy on a course again that would correspond to its name.” Wolfgang Fritz Haug: Demise of the German Left Government – Rise of the Left Party, opus cit., p. 451.

<sup>66</sup> Yet even in this case, where there cannot be any doubt of the clear intention of the Venezuelan president Chávez to introduce a more comprehensive social, anti-neoliberal transformation, the positive outline of another economy and politics can only be recognised in their first beginnings, they are marked by deep ambiguities and are based on the utilisation of strongly increased revenues from oil production. Compare on that in detail: Dorothea Melcher: Venezuela’s oil socialism, in: *Das Argument*, 262 (47th volume), Issue 4/205, pp. 506-520. In that context, it will also turn out, whether the attempts to rely on grassroots movements and production cooperatives as the basis of a new economy, seen by I. Mészáros as the alternative to capitalism and to the old socialism, will be successful.

<sup>67</sup> For instance, it is noted for Brazil: “Neoliberalism is neither only an ideology nor a point of view next to others in a democratic debate. The ‘reforms’, by the transformations, by which they have recast Brazilian economy and society, have created a *material* basis for the reproduction of neoliberalism.” Lecio Moraes; Alfredo Saad-Filho: Lula and the Continuity of Neoliberalism in Brazil: Strategic Choice, Economic Imperative or Political Schizophrenia?, in: *Historical Materialism*, vol. 13: 1, p. 11.

forces that refuse neoliberalism given its objectives and means (also larger parts of the population) and the incapacity to go beyond a social-democratic neoliberalism in a crisis or in the case of taking over government.

The thesis defended here starts from the assumption that a direct break with neoliberalism is impossible, because it would demand enormous resources or would destroy the social order in a civil war-type struggle. In the majority of the cases, left governmental policy should, therefore, at first secure again or respectively re-establish economic, social, and political stability. A part of left-wing government, therefore, places (at first) governmental capability before capacity for change, and at first chooses mainly the following strategy: politics of integration of at least a part of the ruling groups, budgetary rehabilitation, fight against inflation (high-interest-rate policy and high rating of one's own currency), export orientation, attraction of foreign capital. At the same time, measures of active relief of special social problem situations (provision with basic goods, struggle against hunger, misery, poverty, unemployment, criminality) should be initiated and programmes developed or encouraged that may not touch the basic character of the economy, but improve the situation of the concerned.

The question remains, whether there is a fundamental alternative to that, which does not lead to de-stabilisation, collapse of GDP, possibility of open US intervention in countries of the Third World. It must be proven first that an entry into the exit from neoliberalism can completely renounce to neoliberal means. The experiences up to now seem to suggest that this entry requires a strategy that would contain at least five elements: *First*, this would be a break with particularly parasitic forms of the regime up to now (apartheid, Berlusconi's parasitic finance capitalism etc.), the correct dose of shaking off neoliberal fetters (see Argentina: strong devaluation of the foreign debt, but also possibly of domestic debts), insofar this does not lead to a de-stabilising confrontation. *Second*, this would be the opening up of endogenous resources of economic development with high growth potential that would reduce unemployment on a relatively short-term basis, the increase of the incomes of at least part of the middle classes and of worker in the formal sector, increase state receipts etc. *Third*, there belongs to such strategy, the adoption of measures to help the groups most negatively hit by neoliberalism; support of solidary economy (land reform, cooperatives, self-management etc.), rehabilitation or rather strengthening of the systems of public existential provision, elements of basic security. *Fourth*, there is a need for a systematic build-up of a civil society capable of action, the creation of overall conditions that would encourage solidary-emancipative actors of a Centre-Bottom project and confer them a central role in the shaping of the democratic process. *Fifth*, a beginning should be made with the generalisation of entry projects into another economy and social development, into a new shape of democracy that secures broad participation and the social primacy of the social over capital utilization, into a cooperative solidary international system. Only the fulfilment of these tasks would then create the conditions to durably leave the framework of neoliberalism.

The Left can and must strive to introduce ways of a fundamental transformation also (but not just) from a position of government. As argued in another place<sup>68</sup>, it faces the contradiction to have to face up to three conflict lines at the same time: it is confronted with tendencies of an open barbarisation, stands in a fundamental

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<sup>68</sup> Michael Brie: The Left – what can it aim for? opus cit.

opposition to liberal economic, authoritarian, and imperial policy approaches and in conflict with a social democratic or socio-liberal policy on the basis of contemporary financial market capitalism. Today's social democracy is at the same time ally in the struggle against the first two approaches and opponent insofar as it does not try to overcome the basis of the contemporary crisis.

How ambivalent are the results of the most recent governmental participation is shown by the appendix that refers to Latin American, Indian, and South African experiences.<sup>69</sup> Yet also in Europe it becomes clear: Positive individual results are opposed up to now mostly by the incapacity to create a stable, counter-hegemonic formation that will be capable of challenging neoliberalism in its basic elements and to take a stable path of transformation. However, this is the next task. Rosa Luxemburg wrote in 1900: "So the ship of dogma-free socialism returned from its first experimental trip on the waters of practical policy returned with broken masts, smashed steering-wheel and corpses on deck into the harbour."<sup>70</sup> Today a left in the process of re-foundation is in the process of building the new ship of a transformative socialist Left. The study of the wreckages of the past, in that process, is just as important as the analysis of the new conditions.

Translated by Carla Krüger, March 9-13; Re-read on April 23, 2006

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<sup>69</sup> Compare for Germany also the study by Rolf Reißig, and the papers that were written under direction of Edeltraut Felfe.

<sup>70</sup> Rosa Luxemburg: Der Abschluss der sozialistischen Krise in Frankreich (The conclusion of the socialist crisis in France), in: *Works*, Vol. 1.2, p. 179.