

Socialism as a project of social transformation

Theses for a modern socialism
(September 2005)



1. The State Socialist Countries – children of the age of catastrophes	2
2. The failure of social democracy and communism to lastingly transgress capitalism in a positive way	4
3. Socialism before a new beginning	8
3.1 Historical alternatives at the end of the 20 th and in the beginning 21 st century	8
3.2 The Challenges of Neoliberalism – its strengths and weaknesses	10
3.3 A socialist politics as politics of transformation	13
3.4 The development of concrete autonomous projects as the centre of the struggle for hegemony	14
Appendix 1: Reform, Revolution, Transformation – a comparison of core categories	17

rls

Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung Berlin
Center for Policy Research
Franz-Mehring-Platz 1
D-10243 Berlin
+4930-44310 167

1. The State Socialist Countries – children of the age of catastrophes

The Communist revolutions of the 20th century are children of wars – world wars and national wars of liberation. In distinction to the bourgeois revolutions in England, France, Germany and Italy, they broke out in the course of long-lasting wars, which had seized large parts of the population of the respective countries. It was, as Eric Hobsbawm writes, an “age of catastrophes”: “For the old world, everything went wrong: world wars ushered in revolutions and breakdowns of colonial empires. The bourgeois-liberal and democratic state of laws and constitutional orders within 20 years, in lightning speed, yielded to political regimes that one could hardly have imagined before 1914, like Hitler’s Germany and Stalin’s USSR.”¹

The Communist revolutions in many respects contradicted the concepts of Marx-Engels derived from the study of bourgeois revolutions, which also explains the heavy battles between “revisionists” and “orthodox Marxist”, which were both forced to look for new ways. The countries that had a revolution, all were miles away from a historical block, which in a historically dominant way, would have supplied superior answers both to the concrete problems of the respective society and to Western capitalism as a whole and would have tried to implement these. The immediate task, which the actors in these countries faced, was not the creation of an order, which *transcended* capitalism, but the ending of those catastrophes that ravaged these countries, the end of the barbarity of war, impoverishment, mass murder and colonialism. The Communist revolutions began as strategies of socialist actors in an extreme situation. They were formulated under conditions of a daily break-down of civilisation.

Such a rupture of civilisation, which was not caused by the socialist and Communists, but by the Capitalists, imperialist, colonialist, militaristic and racist elites, in the eyes of contemporaries, legitimated the calling of a state of emergency in order to stop it. It seemed justified to stop the break of civilisation by resorting oneself to means which broke with the norms of civilisation. These were, therefore, not only movements of transformation beyond the achievements of existing civilisation, but they contained steps against the surrounding barbarity. They had a large component of “anti- action”: anti-war, anti-capitalism, against the old elites. They first had to deal with these primary tasks.

Who after all wanted to grant democratic rights to those, who had themselves before participated in war or fascism? In the case of the First World War, had not almost all German parliamentarians, even the social democrats, approved of the war credits? Had not the majority of the Russian parties gone to war at about the same time? Did not national socialism in Germany come to power in the framework of the Weimar constitution? Why should a people that, in its great majority, had been faithful to Hitler until the end, obtain democratic rights? Had the Chinese nationalists not fought the Communists more than the Japanese and still not been able to prevent the far-reaching annexation of China by the Japanese aggressors. First and Second World War, the murder of people and the genocide – all this had been so terrible that the use of almost any kind of means seemed in order to secure a “Never more!”²

¹ Eric Hobsbawm: The century of the workers’ movement. *Utopie kreativ* 109/110 (<http://www.rosalux.de/cms/index.php?id=3931>).

² In 1954, Bertolt Brecht wrote in his “Notizen über die Zeit” (Notes on the time): „Some liberties, however, I would not enjoy today, if I desired them. For instance, I cannot vote in the way, in which it is

And yet it is pushed aside today and hardly belongs to everyday consciousness any longer: After 1918 and 1945, it was clear that the great catastrophes had emerged from the unholy alliance of capitalism with imperialism, colonialism and racism as well as militarism. No one at that point could have spoken up seriously against war or fascism, without also turning against capitalism (or at least its “excesses”). Max Horkheimer wrote: “Who does not want to talk about capitalism, should be silent about fascism.” With view to Germany this could also mean that the secret- open continuity between the elites of the Hitler regime and those of West Germany could make one blind for the institutional breaks and discontinuities. The restoration of capitalism and its ruling classes was, at least for open opponents of fascism, who had made great sacrifices, hard to distinguish from the question to what extent there should, in this way, also be held open the possibility for a renewed turn to fascism or militarism. We shall return to that point later.

The terror of civilisational breaks, on the one hand, and the greatness of the Communist vision of a society, in which the roots of war, exploitation and racism would be eradicated by way of an order built on common property and popular rule, on the other hand, were what together created the readiness to seize, in the look back on catastrophes, and in anticipation of the Great Liberty, on exceptional means or to accept them at least. As the great German writer Christa Wolf, who was just 16 years old in 1945, should say later: Marxism and SED were for me “precisely the opposites of what had happened in Fascist Germany. And I wanted precisely the opposite. I in no case wanted something which would be remotely similar to the past. I think that has frequently been the case in my generation. That was the origin of this connection; that was also the reason, why we held on to it for such a long time, precisely not against inner opposition; even later I saw no alternative to it.”³ Ever again, there were revolts with the impulse of Communist visions against the structures of a party dictatorship. The flame of an unconditional emancipative claim was never treaded out. The tension between humanistic vision and the structures of state party socialism marked the history of this socialism in the same way as the systemic competition with fascism and the capitalist West.

The decisions for Soviet Communism and state socialism were often life-time decisions taken out of the experience of profound and traumatic civilisational breaks. By way of the struggle against barbarity and the sacrifices made in this context, the choice of a Communist way of life was often made irrevocable, and became immune to any kind of criticism. These decisions were taken by large parts of a whole generation, linked frequently with the process of becoming responsible and being entrusted with responsibility. The rise of state socialism was an upswing of new groups in society. At the same time, it was a life in the contradiction between Communist-emancipative vision and a reality of a party dictatorship.

‘customary in civilised countries’. I would like to say, why I do not lust for them. The kind of elections we had in Germany cannot have been altogether good. Twice during my life-time, the Germans voted in the kind of civilised way, of which there is the question – for war. Twice they, by way of ‘free elections’, confirmed governments, which plotted criminal wars and then even lost them. There could not be question of genuine liberty: They did not have the possibility to act according to their insight in the necessities. Occasionally, I have also enjoyed some of the liberties, which the bourgeois society offers in the hope that they do not disturb too much. I was allowed, for instance, to say that war belongs to the way of life of the capitalist countries and on occasion becomes their way of death. As we know, I have not prevented wars that way.” Bertolt Brecht: *Schriften zur Politik und Gesellschaft* (Writings on Politics and Society), Vol. 2, Berlin and Weimar: Aufbau Publishers 1968, p. 227 f.

³ Quoted in: Jörg Magenau: *Christa Wolf. Eine Biographie* (Christa Wolf. A biography). Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt Paperback Publishing House, 2002, p. 43.

The replacement of the founding fathers of state socialism, or respectively of those, who had defended it in the Great Fatherland War in a seed of blood against Hitler fascism, was a condition for its humane dissolution. Only when a new generation came to power for whom this power was no longer “holy”, could the attempt be undertaken to reshape it according to its original ideals. New courses could be taken in the name of the old vision.

2. The failure of social democracy and communism to lastingly transgress capitalism in a positive way

The end of state socialism revealed, in the politics of perestroika, once more the humanistic vision of socialism and the aim to end barbarity. It was this double purpose, which constitutes the red line in the history of state socialism. Yet, the look at the purposes suffices just as little as that at the moribund form of society that reached its end between 1989 and 1991. Hegel wrote in 1807 in his preface to the “Phenomenology of the Spirit”: “...The purpose as such is the unliving general, just as the tendency is mere drift, which is still devoid of its reality, and the naked result is the corpse that it has left behind.”⁴ Neither purpose nor result constitutes the truth of a historical formation, as he emphasised, but both of them only in the unity with their real history. Who only looks at the intentions, ignores the objective content of a historical process, who only looks at the naked result in the moment of dying away, cannot understand the reasons for their emergence and for the lasting nature of great social phenomena.

The purposes of social movements become historical reality, when they can unite with powerful means. In these means, the purpose becomes concrete. Historical-materialist analysis, therefore, above all also has to be analysis of the means, which social actors employ to realise their purposes, because: Who wants freedom and sows dictatorship, will harvest dictatorship. Who conducts war against terror, will trigger a comprehensive World War of a new kind. Who fights unemployment by creating the poverty of the unemployed, will have provoked mainly the poverty (of others). The means, thus Hegel, are also “executed purpose.”⁵

Historically, socialist have ever again been divided over the question of means. The social reformist, for the sake of their effectiveness in the given reality, renounced completely the question for means that would point beyond societies dominated by capital. Economic democracy was cut down to co-determination guided by profit dominance, political democracy to the better realisation of the imperatives of capital utilisation. The social basic rights, therefore, remained at best temporary concessions of capital.

And those, who constituted Communist Parties under the leadership of the Soviet III International, put their stakes on the might of a centrally organised force and on Communist dictatorship as the powerful means to be able to withstand the catastrophes of the 20th century and to be able to help the great vision of a free and solidary society to its breakthrough by way of concerting their forces. Its own almightiness to them seemed to be the guarantor of that and yet became the most important obstacle and opened up the way for the Great Terror against the people.

⁴ Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel: *Phänomenologie des Geistes* (Phenomenology of Spirit), Berlin: Academy Publishing House 1967, p. 11.

⁵ The same: *Wissenschaft der Logik. Zweiter Teil* (The science of logics. Second part), Berlin: Academy Publishers 1975, p. 481.

A third group socialists, men and women, could never impose itself in the history of the 20th century against the two other mentioned groups. They wanted to get serious about socialisation and democratisation in a socialist way; they strived for a positive overcoming of the capital-dominated bourgeois societies; and they aimed at the stepwise appropriation of economic and political power by the working classes of society. They wanted to place the civilisational achievements into the service of social justice and popular power and radicalise them in this way. They knew that dictatorship led to stagnation and defeat. Rosa Luxemburg wrote in confrontation both with the social reformists as well as with the Bolsheviki: "We always distinguished the social kernel from the political form of *bourgeois* democracy, we always unveiled the bitter core of social injustice and lack of freedom under the sweet shell of formal equality and freedom, not to renounce these, but in order to spur on the working class not to satisfy themselves with the shell, but rather to conquer political power to fill it with new social contents."⁶ It is the inheritance of this tradition that needs to be picked up critically.

The incapacity of the social reformists to prevent the catastrophes in the first half of the 20th century and to effectively meet the forces of an unchained capitalism, imperialism and militarism as well as fascism, opened the road to a Communist alternative to this barbarity. It promises to employ the most powerful means to stop the forces of this capitalist modernity and of its totalitarian machineries of destruction – the organised and centralised power apparatus of a dictatorship with Communist means. The capacity of Soviet party communism to put such means at the disposal of the humanistic idea of socialism and of the battle against barbarity was the condition of its early success, the achievements, failures, terrible crimes and later demise.

The build-up of a Communist one-party dictatorship, which relies on a centrally planned economy and is legitimated by the ideology of Marxism-Leninism, seemed to be the finally found escape from the capitulation of social reformism and the weakness of action of democratic socialism. The concentration of the whole political, economic and spiritual power in one hand and the subordination of society under the goals of the struggle against external threat and inner division imposed itself over many other alternatives, because it seemed simultaneously convincing to many and of smashing effectiveness in the conquest of power. However, the incapacity to separate productively from these forms of Communist power became the cause of the downfall of Soviet state party socialism.

State party socialism seemed to offer a solution, how the forces of modernity can be harnessed socially and civilly, how anarchy and destruction can be prevented, how security and stability can be guaranteed and a new society can be stamped out of the ground on the rubble of the old: by a radical subordination of all social forces under one centre. From there, there are to grow gradually the conditions for the later free development of each and everyone. This makes clear that state party socialism may in no way be deleted from the history of socialism as a mere "deviation". It certainly had socialist features, and the memory of it as a socialist experiment must remain. Within it, elements of the socialist vision could become reality. High social equality and the responsibility of society for the basic needs for work, confidence in the future, education or health belonged in this realm. There was also a piece of future in this kind of state socialism.

The solution that state party socialism found for the problems of modern societies, however destroyed one of the most important basic features of modern society, the capacity to constantly innovate and remodel all its basics, described by Marx in the

⁶ Rosa Luxemburg: Die russische Revolution (The Russian Revolution). Works, Vol. 4, p. 363.

“Manifesto” with respect to capitalism⁷. By way of the absolute centralisation of the power to dispose over property, all firms and enterprises were relinquished of the opportunity for innovative renewal. By only admitting for one centralised political force and given that each independent adopting of a position stood under the verdict of the prohibition of factions, there were hardly any possibilities left for realistic timely changes of course. As a dominant tendency it holds: The absolute value given to centralised power led to expropriation, the monolithic power of the party to disempowerment, the monopoly on the true teaching to public unconsciousness. Democratic socialist action in state socialism was always also the attempt to face up to these tendencies and to strengthen counter-forces.

Modern societies draw their potential of renewal from the freedom and autonomy of many social forces in economy, politics and the public.⁸ *The autonomy of economic, political, and spiritual subjects as well as their cooperation and their emulation are the conditions of innovations and efficiency.* In the economic, political, cultural and military competition among states and systems, only those survive who conserve these conditions. At the same time, these conditions can also be the cause of unchained capital dominance, of dictatorship, militarism, and racism and usher in catastrophes of the worst dimensions.

The basic question of modernity is: how can the forces of constant change, revolution and renewal be brought under a control that places them at the service of the guarantee and the redemption of the human rights of each and everyone? State party socialism solved this basic problem of modern societies as Alexander the Great the Gordian knot; it simply hewed it apart. The control over the developmental potentials of modern societies became their elimination. The stagnation and lag of the Soviet Union with respect to the USA, Western Europe or Japan was the necessary consequence. It stayed at a catch-up development that finally failed after phases of extensive growth had finally worn out, since no new resources could be won. A real “perestroika” remained impossible.

State party socialism was not able to win against the Western capital-dominated societies, because it was not able to trump it by a higher measure of free development of the individual and also not by a higher measure of the conversion of this development into the solidary development of all.⁹ Without the fulfilment of these two conditions, however, socialism is not a lasting socialism. *Only a modern socialism, grounded in liberty is a socialism capable of survival.* It may be difficult or impossible

⁷ “The bourgeoisie cannot exist without constantly revolutionising the instruments of production, and thereby the relations of production, and with them the whole relations of society. Conservation of the old modes of production in unaltered form, was, on the contrary, the first condition of existence for all earlier industrial classes. Constant revolutionising of production, uninterrupted disturbance of all social conditions, everlasting uncertainty and agitation distinguish the bourgeois epoch from all earlier ones. All fixed, fast-frozen relations, with their train of ancient and venerable prejudices and opinions, are swept away, all new-formed ones become antiquated before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned, and man is at last compelled to face with sober senses his, real conditions of life, and his relations with his kind.” Karl Marx und Friedrich Engels: Communist Manifesto. (<http://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1848/communist-manifesto/ch01.htm>)

⁸ Modern societies shall be called all those societies that have structurally anchored the principles of constant renewal by innovation. Stuart Hall writes: “Essential to the idea of modernity is the belief that everything is destined to be speeded up, dissolved, displaced, transformed, reshaped. It is the shift – materially and culturally – into this new concept of social life which is the real transition to modernity.” Stuart Hall in: Hall, Stuart; Held, David; Hubert, Don; Thompson, Kenneth (eds.): *Modernity. An introduction to Modern Societies.* Oxford; Blackwell 1996, p. 17.

⁹ Compare on that in more detail. “Freedom, equality, solidarity”, paper in preparation of the Beijing Conference on Developments in the Contemporary World, October 2005.

to ride the tiger of modernity, but he, who kills it, will remain on the tracks himself. The problem has to be asked in a new way.

The tragedy of state party socialism, however, goes beyond its incapacity to harness the forces of modernity in a superior way. With the goal of the oppression of capitalism and of their political enemies, the Soviet Communists and their successors set loose forces, which escaped to their own, let alone social control. The centralisation of power in one party, one party leadership and ultimately in one person led to persecution, incarceration, to the destruction of members of “enemy classes” and ultimately to the persecution and destruction of the Bolshevik party and its cadres up to and including the whole army leadership and economic direction. No one has killed so many Communist as the leaderships of the Communist state parties themselves.

The horror of civil war, hunger, terror and forced labour (also) grew from the independent logic of the means, which the Communists seized on to fight against barbarity and to realise the socialist visions. Militarism and imperial expansionary ambition were anchored in the system. In the worst times of Stalinism, state party socialism has itself adopted forms, which themselves represented a fundamental break of civilisation.

The troublesome containment of these forces after 1953 never enabled the realisation of the most important political liberty. Uncontrolled surveillance and arbitrary repression could only be overcome in autumn 1989. The occasional conversion of state party socialism into a totalitarian dictatorship was an objective possibility inherent in its structures. It was the same structures that made resistance against it so difficult. They were also, however, what made it possible that an individual leader Gorbachev could introduce the self-demolition of state socialism from the top. One more time almightiness worked at the centre of the system – on occasion of its disintegration.

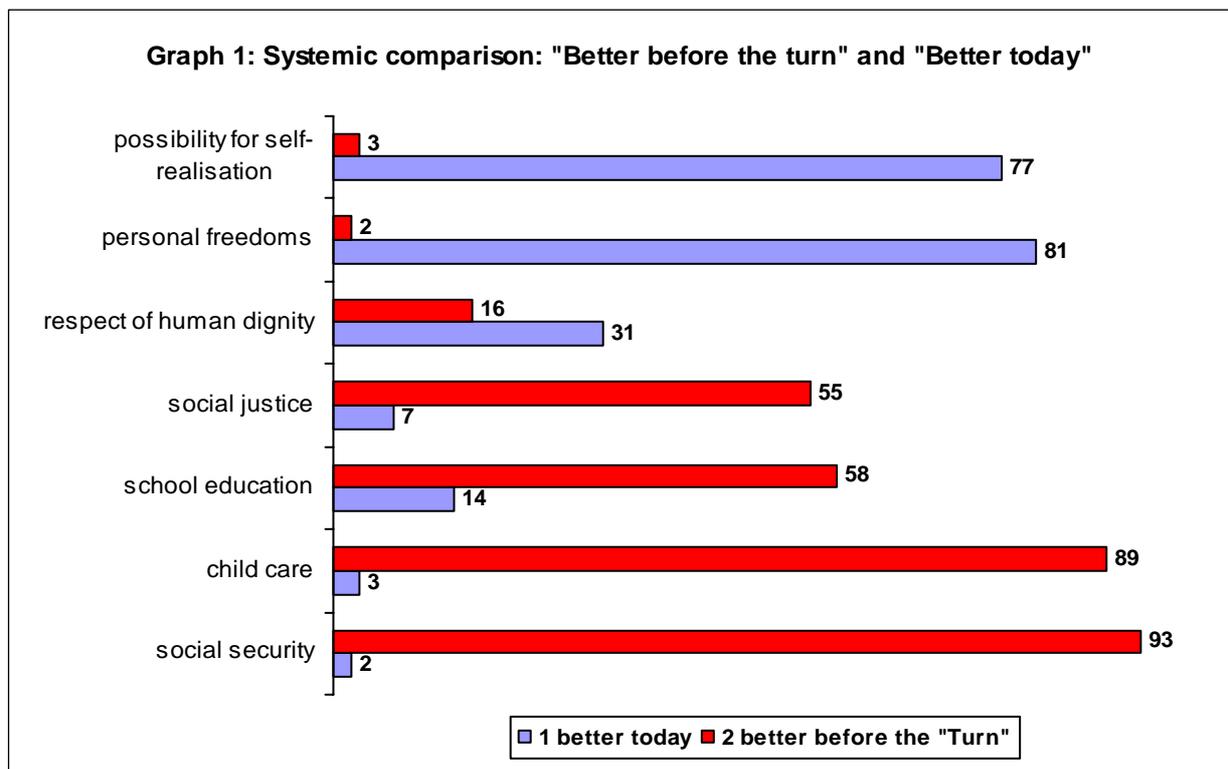
With hindsight, the balance of state party socialism seems ambivalent. It was not to be installed lastingly, and yet has accomplished tasks, of which the majority of the citizens (women and men) wish that they had continued for the duration. A survey of persons, who were 16 in 1989 and are now 31 years old, asked for the advantages of GDR and FRG compared shows that the experience higher liberty, grown possibilities of self-determination as well as – with increasing restrictions – the higher respect of human dignity were counterbalanced by a loss in social security and inter-human solidarity as well as the clearly sunk redemption of social rights (see graph 1¹⁰ above). The right to work is increasingly seen as the condition of liberty.

The demise of state socialism has left uncompleted tasks. We stand at the beginning of a new age of catastrophe and new barbarity and total rule, if a change of direction of human development won't take place. The overcoming of capital dominance and new imperialism become the essential condition for preventing renewed breaks of civilisation. New movements are facing up to the old task of realising freedom, equality and solidarity¹¹ and to guarantee for each and every one safe access to the fundamental freedom goods of modern societies.¹²

¹⁰ Peter Förster: Ohne Arbeit keine Freiheit! Warum 15 Jahre nach der Wende die Kritik junger Ostdeutscher am gegenwärtigen Gesellschaftssystem weiter zunimmt (Without work no freedom! Why 15 years after the Turn the criticism of young East Germans against today's social system continues to increase), Study 2004, p. 82.

¹¹ Compare Jai Sen, Anita Anand, Arturo Escobar, Peter Waterman: Challenging Empires – the World Social Forum. New Dehli: The Viveka Foundation, 2004.

¹² Compare: Party Programme of the PDS (2003).



The end and the beginning, the becoming and the passing away, the right life or the wrong one – of much can there be told today, fifteen years after the end of state socialism with a first historical distance. What was devalued in 1989 to a footnote of history, to an accident, seems to me, looked at from today's point of view and with the insight on tendencies of new barbarity and total rule, a lasting educational play of history. The reasons for the decision for this kind of socialism again lie clearly before our eyes, and it remains important not to forget the lessons of its transformation into dictatorship and stagnation.

Fifteen years afterwards, however, also new things have begun – again. Again a new world is being demanded. And the old vision, which Ernst Bloch cast in the following words, is beginning to become a new force: "*The real genesis is not at the beginning, it is at the end, and it only starts, when society and existence become radical, meaning, seize themselves at the root. The root of history, however, is the working, creating person, refashioning and overtaking the opportunities. Once he has seized him- or herself and founded what is theirs without expropriation and alienation in real democracy, then there will emerge something in the world that shone into everyone's childhood and where no one has been yet: home.*"¹³

3. Socialism before a new beginning

3.1 Historical alternatives at the end of the 20th and in the beginning 21st century

By late 60s of the 20th century, a historical parting of the different ways of development had emerged, which marks our era until today:

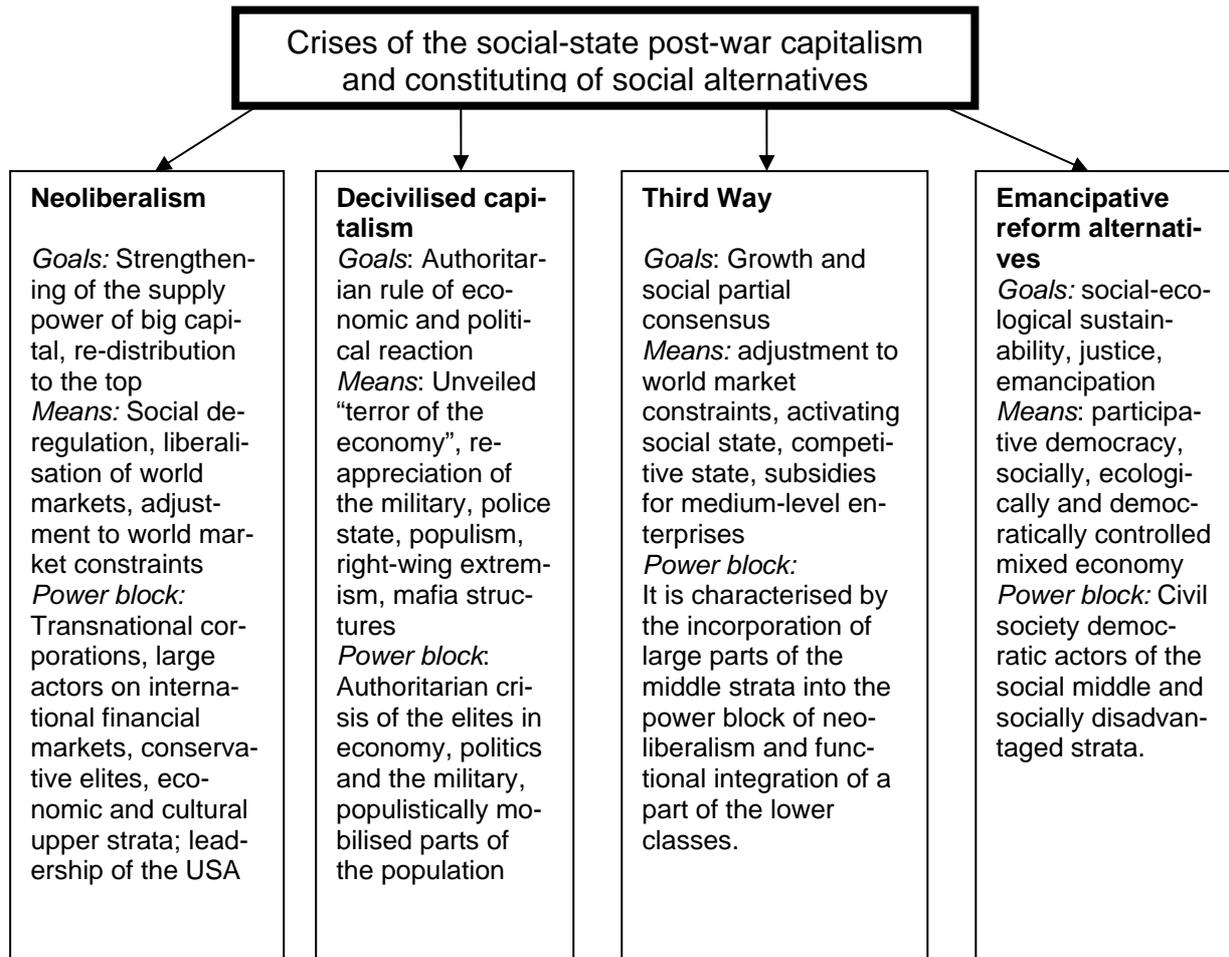
- *The neoliberally marked developmental path* since then determines the global agenda. This neoliberalism puts its stakes on the unleashing of capitalism by way of deregulation of markets, the creation of conditions for the predominance of global financial capital markets in the world economy and the subordination of the

¹³ Ernst Bloch: *Hope as Principle*, German edition: Frankfurt-am-Main: Suhrkamp Taschenbuch Wissenschaft 1985, Werke, Vol. 5, p. 1628.

national economy under its guidelines, by the privatisation of social security systems, knowledge, education and natural resources. Labour power is reconverted into a mere commodity. Neoliberalism needs a strong security state, since it is linked with enormous social and cultural tensions. It is based not last on the imperial role of the USA as global judge and policeman in one. The bloody coup d'état of Pinochet against the socialist government of Chile in 1973 was the declaration of war by neoliberalism against the people.

- Neoliberalism can, under certain conditions, in the framework of the war against terror", of a sharpening battle over resources and growing social conflicts usher in a situation of de-civilised capitalism and a World Civil War. Already now, there are tendencies of de-civilisation, losses of democracy, tendencies to a surveillance state, appreciation of wars, spread of right-wing extremism and populism, intervention of criminal economy into the legal economy. Already today, prisoners of war of the USA are interned in concentration camps and systematically tortured.
- The *Third Ways of New Social democracy*, competing temporarily with the neoliberal road, were the attempt of a splits in between subordination under the rule of the world financial markets and maintenance of social state counterweights. In the meantime, they have transformed in most countries into more or less moderate variants of the neoliberal path. Whether they can experience a renewal for instance in Northern Europe or in a number of Latin American countries remains to be seen. The failure of these Third Ways can, in turn, reinforce the danger of the development of a de-civilised, Barbaric capitalism.
- *Emancipative alternatives*, which aim at social, economic and ecological sustainability, remain up to now in the world of concepts and ideas rather than to seize on real politics. Attempts like Allende's democratic reforms in Chile or the Swedish struggle for extending social democracy to economic democracy were defeated in the 70ies. Yet today, around the globe, at World Social Forums and in daily battles, again alternatives to capitalism are formulated and at times already take on palatable shape. People demand socially equal sharing in conditions, which will allow them a self-determined life in social security and solidarity. Their desire is a just and democratic society, where the dominance of profit yields to the maxim of life in dignity for every woman, man and child.

Graph 2: Developmental path at the end of the 20th and beginning 21st century



3.2 The Challenges of Neoliberalism – its strengths and weaknesses

The first revolutionary act, said Rosa Luxemburg, is to state loudly and clearly what is. Sometimes the illusion that an alternative programme is enough for changing course is the basis for an accommodation to neoliberalism. It is not enough to develop convincing alternatives for a change of direction to become possible. The main problem is not that we are lacking alternatives, but it is the hegemonic force dominating society and the relationships of forces in society. Neoliberalism has succeeded in forming a strong historical block, which has transfixed the Left into a lasting state of historical defensive.

First of all, the core of neoliberalism is formed by the productivity paradigm of the liberation of the potentials of unleashed market forces and modern high technologies. It managed at least in part to break open productivity blockages and to integrate new parts of the world population. It imposed the dominance of intellectual labour over physical labour (Marx) in the production of value. Neoliberalism represents the claim of the superior productive solution of the crisis of Fordist capitalism and of increased possibilities for individual self-determination and social participation by way of doing away with the authoritarian social state regulation. *Neoliberalism possesses legitimacy.*

Second, the social basis of neoliberalism is constituted by the alliance of the neoliberal power elites with the highly qualified information and communication workers (female and male) – a kind of Top-Centre alliance operating at the conditions of the power *élites* that at the same time promises central groups of society new life per-

spectives and opportunities for self-development and in part also brings these promises to fruition. The guiding image is the free, auto-determined individual of the entrepreneur selling his or her own labour power and consumer of his or her existential provision and the society as one of the contracts among frees and equals which are realised by way of the market. Emancipative achievements of the new social movements of the 1960s were integrated. Those who by way of their market position can promise themselves a privileged position or rather social ascent and increased opportunities for participation are being positively integrated, and those who, due to lack of achievable alternatives, integrate themselves independently into the neoliberal reform projects in order not to fall by the wayside are forced to be loyal. Neoliberalism is a Top Centre project, which includes the creation of under-classes that are either functional at minimal remuneration or laid idle. It constitutes a “passive revolution”, in which the ruling class is “leading vis-à-vis the allied classes and ruling vis-à-vis the opposing classes” (Gramsci).¹⁴ *Neoliberalism is a socially and culturally anchored project.*

Third, at the centre of the neoliberal block, there stand central political projects such as the marketwise shaping of the whole society, the privatisation of existential provision, the demolition of social-state guarantees of basic rights, the increase of democratic participation in the course of transformation of regions and municipalities into zones of free competition, the creation of a broad social group of the *working poor* as cheap providers of simple services etc. etc. The conflict between the imperial, neoliberal project of the USA and the multilateral neoliberal project of the core-EU is mainly a conflict over how to guarantee the security of this neoliberal globalisation and whether the USA in this matter can dictate the conditions unilaterally or not. *Neoliberalism defends feasible projects. It is doable.*

Fourthly, the most important lever for the implementation of neoliberal hegemony has been the creation of a globalised finance capitalism, which subjects the conditions of capital utilisation to those of speculative financial markets. Any possible productive investment, any “location”, any work contract thus competes with the conditions that might be achieved by the trade in bonds, foreign currency, loans and their derivatives.¹⁵ It has come to a “qualitative subjection of the real economic and social relationships under the financial system.”¹⁶ That way, there is created, beyond ideological claims, a situation of far-reaching lack of alternatives. *Neoliberalism acts precisely also by way of its (seeming?) independence of the interests and convictions of those, who act in the system it created.* It can refer to the power of the facts.

Left politics also cannot evade the material constraints political created by neoliberalism without risking capital flight, inflation and depression. When the rules of the game are dictated in a neoliberal way, the Left has to ask itself, how it can nonetheless still “play on the left” in a convincing manner. This concerns acting as opposition as well as participations in government.

Neoliberalism possesses legitimacy, is socially anchored, feasible and acts by way of material constraints. The democratic, solidarity-based alternative project must be conscious of this fourfold strength of the neoliberal project in order to be able to

¹⁴ HKWM (Historical Critical Dictionary of Marxism), Vol. 6.1, p. 14.

¹⁵ Compare on this in detail: Mario Candeias: Neoliberalismus, Hegemonie. Grundrisse einer transnationalen kapitalistischen Produktions- und Lebensweise. Eine Kritik (Neoliberalism, hegemony, sketch of a transnational capitalist way of life and production. A critique), Hamburg: Argument Publishers 2004, pp. 105-117.

¹⁶ Elmar Altvater: Globale Finanzinnovationen, privates Computergeld und sozialisierte Schulden (Global financial innovations, private computer money and socialised debts). In: Prokla 103 (1996), 26th year, p. 250.

challenge it seriously: ideological and cultural legitimacy, broad social basis, feasibility and capability for action.

The weaknesses of neoliberal hegemony are its limited and parasitic class character, which abandons the project of universal realisation of human rights and which has catastrophic consequences. Neoliberalism is an ambivalent project. Its weaknesses are the flip-sides of its already-mentioned strengths. It has four consequences that put its own foundations into question:

Firstly, the neoliberal break with capital-dominated Fordism and with state socialism has unleashed new potentials and simultaneously locked them up in the corset of profitability at the conditions of the globalised finance capital markets and of privatisation. As a result, there emerges an economy of expropriation, of the “enclosing” of common goods, which are subtracted to free utilisation, public as well as private under-accumulation – the accelerated destruction of the natural foundations of human life. As measured against the *new* opportunities, the neoliberal project becomes contra-productive.

The project of modernity, as characterised by the enlightenment, French revolution and emancipative movements (like the women’s, labour, anti-colonial and anti-racist movements) is forcibly rolled back to the project capitalism. It is the case of counter-revolution. Instead of a trinity of social basic rights, democratic participation, there is realised a Barbaric trinity of class society, authoritarianism and global dictatorship. It is this trinity which sets free again elements of totalitarian rule and open barbarity, such as was done by market liberalism and imperialism at the end of the 19th century. In the end, there was Auschwitz.

Second, neoliberalism in the centres again splits the bourgeois societies integrated by the social state into open class societies and ends all attempts to overcome the class societies in the developing countries. Increasingly, life chances are again allocated according to one’s class background.¹⁷ And the latter is influenced in turn by gender, ethnicity, nationality, status of the corresponding country in world society etc. Instead of human rights as redeemable claims, there were pushed through again class privileges, on the one hand, and expropriation and deprivation of rights on the other. Yet, freedom without equality is exploitation. Not multitude, but a hierarchical and polarised class society becomes ever more the reality. To a unity of the rulers, there is still opposed a fragmentation of the dependent. Instead of freedom and equality, there is imposed bondage and inequality.

Even those, who according to the standards of income and recognition are rather privileged, must submit to the systematically acting constraints of self-marketisation, renounce to a self-determined way of living and to a private life. Short time horizons and great insecurity make autonomy almost impossible. Neoliberalism as a consequence undermines its own legitimation. It stops having an emancipative project. Totalitarian marketisation destroys the foundations of individuality and for a self-determined life.

The promised participation is to a large extent fictitious. It consists to a large extent of the individually responsible execution of material constraints, which were created politically by the interaction of multinational concerns, neoliberal political elites and the management of IMF, WTO and World Bank. Only the way and shape of the

¹⁷ As Mark Siemons formulates in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*: “Up to now even the unemployed could consider themselves to a certain extent as employees of the great company Federal Republic, which equipped all of its citizens with many differing but at least still comparable consumption and life-style possibilities: today even employees have to feel like potential unemployed, which at any point may drop out of their accustomed life world.” FAZ, September 13th, 2004, p. 35.

implementation of these material constraints remains for democratic disposal. This reminds one fatally of the democratic centralism of Soviet state socialism, which was rightly called a dictatorship. Important parts of the population are being excluded from any form of participation.

Thirdly, neoliberal politics builds up a unilateral or multilateral empire. Resistance is overcome by economic, political and military pressure. The repression increases both towards the inside and towards the outside. It is used to try and push through a *pax neoliberal* that links the global, military force monopoly to regional oligopolies and at each violation of this *pax neoliberal* calls out the state of emergency. This *pax neoliberal* draws its legitimacy from the combination of the contrasts between neoliberal and anti-modern fundamentalism, of Bush and Bin Laden.

The policy pursued by neoliberalism turns out to be increasingly conflict-laden, unproductive and inefficient, if one measures it against the promises of neoliberalism itself, let alone the expectations of large parts of the population. The projects being implemented draw a large measure of consequences in their wake, which transform feasibility into a threat. The word by Walter Benjamin “that it goes on like this, *is the catastrophe*” (emphasis mine – M.B.) gains new meaning.

Fourth, the lack of alternatives created artificially and the power of the facts lose its hegemonic power to the extent that it becomes illegitimate, anti-social and dangerous. That is how it becomes a power relying less on persuasion and charisma than on mere power or the lack of concrete ways of escape. In this way, it becomes undermined.

The population in Germany is reacting to this development, firstly, with the sharpening of perception of social problems along the axes: work, justice, democracy and income/wealth, second, with a growing disappointment with and distrust of the ruling politics, third, growing fear of the future in particular by the middle and the lower strata of society, and fourth, with an ever more vehement rejection of the ruling classes and elites.

3.3 A socialist politics as politics of transformation

“A class formation”, thus Wolfgang Fritz Haug in the *Historical Critical Dictionary of Marxism* with reference to Antonio Gramsci, “is ‘historically progressive’ thanks to its historical ‘productivity’, that means the expansionism of concrete political and economic regimes thanks to which it ‘drives forward the whole society, by not only fulfilling existential needs but by enlarging the number of its leaders by a continuous appropriation of new industrial and productive spheres of action’ and by thus nourishing the convincing expectations of individual ‘life perspectives’.”¹⁸

It is the task of a new socialist Left to formulate goals and means, which are superior to those of capitalism and neoliberalism from the point of view of individual life perspectives as well as long-term social development. To defeat neoliberalism it must, therefore, create its own higher productivity, its own social alliance, concrete projects and lastingly effective institutions that will secure the realisation of an emancipative transformation. This requires a policy of sustainability, social inclusion and comprehensive realisation of human rights, a just and peaceful world order.

Such a policy requires equally the surmounting of an orthodox social democratic concept of reform and of an orthodox Communist understanding of revolution by the development of a new concept of transformation (whose basic features are summarised in the table in appendix 1). The goal is the victory over profit dominance over

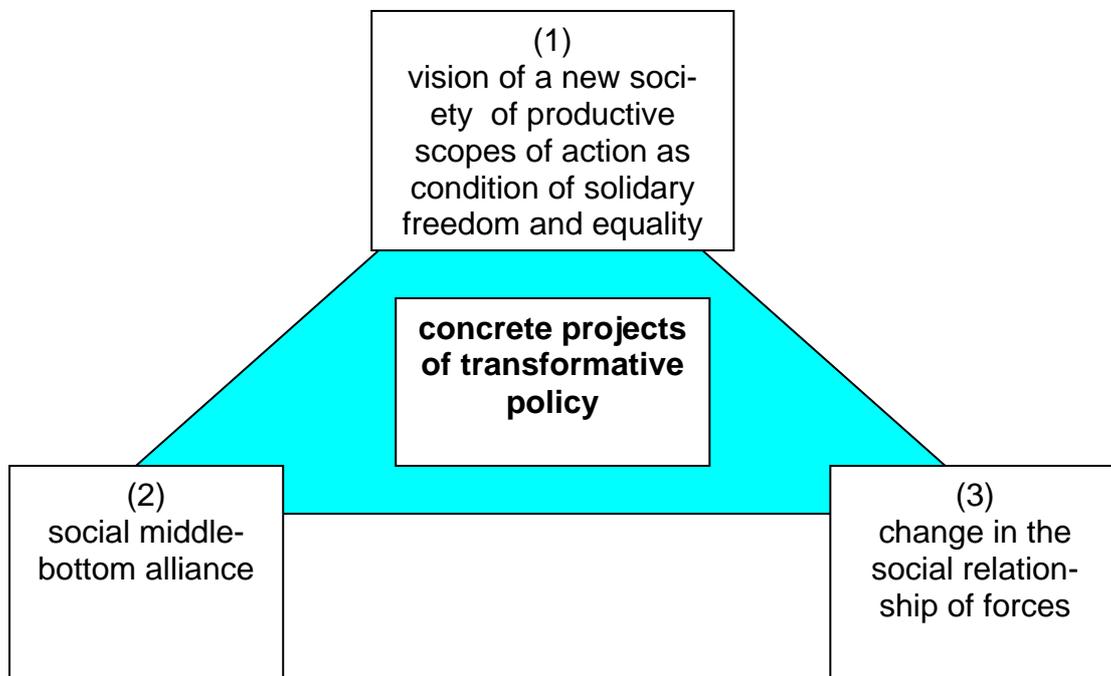
¹⁸ HCDM, Vol. 6/I, p. 14 f.

economy and society by way of a comprehensive democratisation, the extension of non-capitalist elements, tendencies and sectors, the development of the solidarity-based economy and the subjugation of capital utilisation under social and ecological goals.

3.4 The development of concrete autonomous projects as the centre of the struggle for hegemony

The struggle for the active delegitimation of neoliberalism, the demonstration of its internal contradictions, the non-redemption of the goals it promised, their distortion into economic, social, cultural, ecological and political catastrophes will only become a real claim to an independent emancipative counter-hegemony, which is more than a “No!” and also more than the contrary of neoliberalism, when it takes on material force in emancipative, solidarity-based initial projects for “another world”.

Graph 3: The Strategic Triangle of Left Politics



The project of a solidary, emancipative transformation can only be realised as a social-based project, as an alliance of interests, a social contract between those groups, which form the productive core strata (the “general or intellectual production worker”) and those, which are subdued and marginalised by neoliberalism. In such an alliance, the new (and old) middle strata can gain a higher degree of social security, a stable social environment and social integration, qualitatively high-value services, human dignity, domestic demand for products and services. The lower strata would obtain a basic insurance, access to the “freedom goods” of the society, chances for a far-reaching participation in social life. All of this must come together in a project of a new and higher social productivity. However, the middle strata are still caught in the illusion that the chances of the neoliberal project are higher than the dangers, or they see no alternative at all and subordinate themselves.

Such a Middle-Below project requires a broad political and cultural alliance of social movements, left parties and organisations as well as forces in the state apparatuses, of the economy, culture, the media etc. that is superior to that of neoliberalism. In Gramsci’s terms, it is a historical block, “the creation of aggregate capacity of ac-

tion with society-wide reach.”¹⁹ However, the trade unions are still caught in a defensive battle (although there are first signs of different approaches), social democracy sees its chances in moderate neoliberalism, the social movements are, to a far extent, middle-class movements, the marginalised are politically and culturally isolated.

The core of a solidarity-based emancipative transformation is formed by initial projects that give the Middle-Bottom alliance and the vision of a new productivity a concrete content and can become the common organising reference point of a new historical block, with the help of which we can wrestle for a change of the social relationship of forces.

Initial projects, thus Lutz Brangsch, are projects of open participative, democratic learning:

- 1) Initial projects mediate between reform and revolution as well as between protest and design by inducing lasting shifts of power constellations and drawing a broad re-grouping and re-definition of actors in society in their wake.
- 2) Initial projects must not only be designed for success but they must also make people capable of dealing with success.
- 3) Initial projects mediate between locality, regionalism and globalism.
- 4) Initial projects mediate the totality of way of life, cultural and historical identity.
- 5) Initial project are processes of conscious social learning in the unity of change and self-transformation.

Main features of a transformational policy that is able to defeat capital dominance, on the basis of the positions developed here, will be the following capital goals:

- 1) Overcoming of the dominance of global financial capitalism, among other things by the annulment of public debts of the developing countries, the introduction of taxes on international financial speculation and its curtailment, the creation of a newly regulated world currency system, the elimination of all forms of tax, legal and bank paradises, the gradual introduction of global minimal social and environmental standards;
- 2) Gradual lifting of the dependence of the fulfilment of the basic needs of citizens of capitalistically dominated markets by forms of need-oriented basic insurance, efficient public sectors in the social sector, in health, education and transport etc.; basic rights and public existential provision must enjoy precedence over free trade;
- 3) Build-up of a participative social democracy, beginning at the communal level up to global processes, which aligns the framework conditions of all economic activity with the social interests of the lower and middle strata of the population and subjects decisions to their participation;
- 4) Realisation of the social obligation of all property in the interests of the lower and middle social strata and subsequent generations (principle of social and ecological sustainability) as well as the co-determination of those employed as well as all groups directly concerned by the decisions of economic companies in the essential decisions of these companies;
- 5) Roll-back of the military imperial power of the USA and transformation of the regional organisations into powers of peace, which invest their political, economic, and cultural possibilities for crisis prevention on the basis of the UNO and under unconditional respect of international law; persecution of terrorists on the basis of the state of law principle and according to the provisions of international criminal law and procedure.

¹⁹ Ibidem, p. 23.

The journey, which the Left sets off for today²⁰, should resemble to the journey of which Ernst Bloch in his young years wrote hopefully that it was a journey of departure, aimed at a point of revolution: “Hardship, darkness, crackling ice, the calm of the seas and happy journey lie around this spot. There mounts, in the case of lucky breakthrough, the country, where no one has been yet, yes that never existed before itself. And that needs man: wanderer, compass, depth in the land at the same time.”

It requires both creativity as well as enormous perseverance. There should be dared a new step of linkage between freedom and equality – in the traditions of the workers’ movement, the women’s movement, anti-colonial, anti-racist and especially also anti-militaristic struggles, in the traditions of a divided 1968 in Prague and Paris, as organic part of the great beginning that started with the uprising of the Zapatistas in Chiapas and found in the movement of the social forums its most important gathering space. With a goal smaller than this, the journey should not even begin.

Translated by Carla Krüger, September 2-3, 2005

²⁰ Compare: Michael Brie (ed.): *The Left Party: Origins, Aims, Expectations*, rls, Dietz, English version, forthcoming September-October 2005.

Appendix 1: Reform, Revolution, Transformation – a comparison of core categories

	Reformism	Orthodox understanding of revolution	Modern socialist approach toward transformation
<i>Basic notion of Contemporary society</i>	Market economy	Capitalism	Capital-dominated society
<i>Notion of change</i>	Changed regulation of the given	Total break	Extension of non-capitalist elements, tendencies and sectors as well as non-capitalist overall regulation
<i>Overarching goal of change</i>	Civilising of contemporary societies, while maintaining capital dominance	Radical social break with the totality of the relationships of present societies and construction of a completely different society	Reinvention of democracy
<i>Economic goal of change</i>	Social market economy	Radical social break with the totality of the conditions of present-day and construction of a completely different society	Development and extension of the sectors of a solidary economy and subordination of capital utilisation under socio-ecological goals
<i>Targeted way of regulation</i>	Market-dominance and social-state regulation	Centralised planned economy	Dominance of social guidelines (setting of framework), primacy of social basic rights, preference for local and regional economies (de-globalisation)
<i>Main advantage as opposed to pure capitalism</i>	Higher measure of equality, democracy and civilisation	Conscious control of all areas of life and thereby prevention of crisis and catastrophes	Higher measure of individual self-determination and transformation of the same into solidary development of all
<i>Basic values</i>	Basic rights of equal partaking, but according to the conditions of a capital-dominated society	Equality within a given alternative order	Equal access to freedom goods; self-determination and social security in an order based on solidarity

	Reformism	Orthodox understanding of revolution	Modern socialist approach toward transformation
<i>Relationship to capital utilisation</i>	Social regulation of capital utilisation	Elimination of capital utilisation and imposition of a pure social economy	Surmounting of the dominance of capital utilisation of economy and society (primacy of social logic over capital logic)
<i>Relationship to Property</i>	Social obligation of private property	Etatisation of property	De-commodification of the goods of liberty including labour; extension of cooperative forms especially in the area of existential provision; subjugation of private property of means of production under social target criteria
<i>Social force of change</i>	Alliance of the organised working people and the reform-oriented forces of capitalism	Workers (and peasants)	Middle-Below alliance
<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 organisation and of the masses to revolution	Build-up of a large network (economic, social, political, cultural) as the basis of independent design and of negotiations
<i>Understanding of democracy</i>	Representative democracy	Power by the people, exercised by an avantgarde	Participative democracy and of the basic right to a self-determined life
<i>Relationship to globalisation</i>	Global governance	Socialist internationalism on the basis of the agreement between the interests of all exploited	Coupling of de-globalisation and alternative rules of solidary cooperation
<i>Peace policy</i>	Civilising of large powers and imposition of an order based on international law but controlled by them	Elimination of the causes for wars by the elimination of capitalism	De-militarisation, over-coming of poverty, exclusion, foreign domination in the framework of a transformation strategy