

JÖRG ROESLER Leftist Regional Parties in Western Europe – an Experience for the PDS?

Only sporadically do regional conflicts in Western Europe receive attention in the media. This occurs mostly in cases of violence, as is the case in the Basque region or in Corsica. But the number of regions demanding more rights from their respective »nation state« is much more numerous. »Nation state parties« mainly cater to the majority of the electorate in a given country. Therefore specific regional interests are mainly represented by regional parties – and these are mostly left-wing. But the dilemma of the PDS in Germany is that it tries to be both – an East German regional and a German nation-state party, to the left of the Social Democrats. The author argues that the combination of these – at times conflicting – objectives demands a more sophisticated structure than the PDS currently has.

GRETCHEN BINUS Trends of Monopolist Property

Monopolist property today dominates all structures of power in the society. Its development, as a special category of capitalist ownership of the means of production, contributes toward a reactionary solution of the contradictions between the social production, on the one hand, and the private appropriation, on the other. The author describes how the increasing socialization of capital, through joint-stock companies and capital, depresses the barriers for profitable investments and helps create an ongoing gigantic redistribution of material and mental resources to the benefit of the even further accumulation of the big capital. The small and medium enterprises, with all of their economic power, are closely linked to the monopolist property. Their growth or demise is directly dependant upon the big capital profit logic. Therefore, stopping the dominance of the monopoly capitalist forms is a primary challenge to all democratic forces.

IRENE GALLINGE A New Dimension of Insolvency

In the year 2002, the annual number of cases of insolvency in Germany was four times higher than in the beginning of the Nineties. Such an enduring series of bankruptcies is without precedent. It surpasses the traditional scheme of the cyclic growth and recession. Today's cases of insolvency no longer serve as a means of structural renovation. They no longer open the way to new growth. They become a brake on further economic development. They are obviously signs of profound changes in the conditions for growth in capitalism in general. The author discusses particularly the influence of these changes on the small and medium sized enterprises and comes to the conclusion that the government planned regulation does not effectively help these enterprises back onto the path of growth and stability.

UBIRATÁN DE SOUZA The Participatory Budget in the Federal State Rio Grande do Sul (Brasil)

The Participatory Budget was launched in 1989 in the Brazilian town of Porto Alegre. Ten years later, it had conquered the whole Federal State of Rio Grande do Sul – of which Porto Alegre is the capital. The author – who, as Secretary of State for Budget and Finances, had been directly involved – describes the structure and the process of Participatory Budget in Rio Grande do Sul in 1999: The more than 660 municipal public meetings, the regional meetings, the discussions of investment priorities, the final meetings of the State Council of Participatory Budget and the delivery of the Budget Planning to the Parliament. He also discusses the effects that the meetings have had on popular political thinking and behavior as well as on the general democratization of the society as a whole.

FRANCISCO DE OLIVEIRA

São Paulo: the Participatory Budget's »Litmus test«

While referring to the history of efforts to create new types of people's participation in governing and administrating municipalities – a history that began with the Commune de Paris, extending beyond the liberal traditions of North America at the beginning of the 20th century and stretching to the revolutionary councils in Turino, the banlieue rouges of Paris and the developments in Grenoble, Bologna and Modena in the Sixties – the author examines the basics of Participatory Budgeting of Porto Alegre, Belo Horizonte and Rio Grande do Sul. He goes on to describe the special conditions of the Participatory Budget of São Paulo, which – in contrast to Porto Alegre – is only beginning. São Paulo represents, the author maintains, with its 12 million inhabitants a »litmus test« for the general concept of Participatory Budget.

KLAUS-RAINER RUPP

Participatory Budget as a Left Alternative to »Citizens' Municipality«

The author compares the model of Participatory Budget of Porto Alegre to a model known as »Citizens' Municipality« that he knows from his hometown, Bremen. This Bremen model – he analyses – also calls for more transparency, for more public discussions. The decisive difference is that these appeals are not made with the objective of a broader popular participation, beginning already at the level of budget planning and extending throughout the subsequent decision making process, as is the case in Porto Alegre. In Bremen, the aim is to minimize public protest and to create an »understanding« for the budget cuts and privatization of public services, which is taking place in nearly all German towns and municipalities.

MARIO CANDEIAS

Left perspectives for the provision of public goods and the generalization of social rights

This article makes a résumé of the contributions to the first workshop of a European network on »privatization – public goods – regulation« in construction. It debates the neoliberal policy of commodifying any social relation, transnationally exercised, while trying to defend the vital public goods necessary for a life in dignity. At the same time, from a grassroots perspective, the contributions focus on the criticism and politicization of the concept of global public goods. The necessity becomes apparent for combining local anti-privatization movements with a critical reconstruction of a public sphere, alternative forms of social provision of public goods and transnational generalization of social rights.

HALINA BENDKOWSKI

Beyond EMMA. Or: How to Remember and to Promote the Feminist Discussion?

The author takes the publication of the book »Historisch-kritisches Wörterbuch des Feminismus« (Historically Critical Dictionary of Feminism) as an opportunity to discuss some results of the feminist movement in Germany during the past decade. Looking into some of the absurdities of the male dominated women's research, praising the UN-declaration of 1993 »Women's Rights are Human Rights« as an important change in the anti-violence-debates and criticizing the actual development of German feminism as a sort of »one woman show« of EMMA-publisher, Alice Schwarzer. She recommends that feminism find its way back to the real political struggle for gender democracy and against inequality in income and social status.