

Transformative Organizing – Strategies to Challenge the Cuts and Change Society

International Conference | September 22-24

Berlin | Mendelsohnbau | Alte Jakobstr. 149

There will be simultaneous translation available.

Social movements and left politics are forced to engage in struggles against debt ceilings, austerity politics and the dismantling of social rights and democratic participation. Many of these struggles are preliminary and (necessarily) defensive. How can we introduce transformative perspectives into these struggles? How can we prevent the split between reformist, short-term politics and transformative, anti-capitalist politics that so often leads to conflicts and mutual isolation?

Community organizing projects in the USA have a tradition of pragmatic orientation towards everyday problems and shared interests of the community. “Transformative Organizing” attempts to systematically include more far-reaching perspectives and demands into the day-to-day work.

The conference will present and discuss experiences from American and German projects, movements and mobilizations.

Topics will include:

- Experiences in transformative organizing projects, what “works”, what are the bumps and barriers?
- Differences in political systems of the US and Germany concerning funding, the role of the state, and political culture?
- Strategic interests of an institutional left (e.g. the Left Party in Germany) in the strengthening and independent development of poor people’s movements and other social movements?
- More broadly: What could be the contribution of (transformative) community organizing to strengthening the “Mosaic Left”, an idea of bringing together different left traditions, cultures, and organizations to build a counter-hegemonic project?

Schedule

THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 22

6.00 pm: Opening Panel

Perspectives of transformative strategies in times of austerity politics: How can we strengthen transformative moments in the context of survival and defense struggles?

Nik Theodore (Univ. Chicago), Lian Mann (Labor/Community Strategy Center, LA), Margit Mayer (FU Berlin), Jane Wills (Univ. London, solicited)

Chair: Christina Kaindl (Rosa Luxemburg Foundation/RLF)

Reception, Fingerfood

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 23

10.00 am: Comparing the US and Germany: Similarities and differences in political and civil society.

Difficulties with importing strategies? Alinsky in Germany, Alinsky for the left?

Alex Demirovic (TU Berlin/RLF), Maite Tapia (Cornell Univ.), NN (German Institute for Community Organizing, solicited)

Lunch Break

2.00 pm: How can Community and Labor movements / mobilizations strengthen each other?

Steve Williams (POWER, San Francisco), Eric Mann (Labor/Community Strategy Center), Jeffrey Raffo (IG Metall), Ulrich Wohland (Orka, solicited)

Coffee Break

4.30 pm: Organizing around Urban and Community conflicts

Sendolo Diaminah (Peoples' Durham), NN (City Life/La Vida Urbana, solicited), Nik Theodore (Univ. Chicago), Margit Mayer (FU Berlin)

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 24

10.00 am: Building alliances: Ethnic and religious minorities, Party politics and movements

Cindy Wiesner (global grassroots justice), Corinna Genschel (Contact Point for social movements, The left faction in parliament), Josina Morita (United Congress of Community and Religious Organizations), Christina Kaindl (Krisenproteste, RLF)

Lunch Break

2.00 pm: What specifically is transformative in our praxis, what works, what doesn't?

Cindy Wiesner, Eric Mann, Sendolo Diaminah, Steve Williams, NN City Life, Jeffrey Raffo ... all activists

— official end around 5pm —

Strategic talks and Dinner with speakers