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The new German party THE LEFT

When the party THE LEFT was founded on June 16th 2007 one message was made clear: The party will become a major power in the political system of the Federal Republic of Germany. "We came to stay", said Lothar Bisky, together with Oskar Lafontaine, one of the co-chairman of the party. But what are the chances of this party to shape the power relations and politics in Germany. Four problems are discussed in the following: The emergence of the new left party, its current situation, the possibility of a centre-left alliance and some features of alternative reforms.

1. The emergence of THE LEFT

The project of the new left party in Germany stems from three sources – (1) a broader part of the population looking for alternatives in difference to neoliberalism, (2) the Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS) and (3) the Electoral Alternative Labor and Social Justice (WASG).

The popular resistance against neoliberalism

In the "Golden 70s" of the 20th century, the world of the old Federal Republic still seemed to be intact. As a comprehensive study of the West German élites showed, these enjoyed the confidence of the majority of the population, which left them their power on a simple premise: that there existed a consensus on value and politics between citizens – women, men, and youth – and those who disposed over economics and politics, on the basis of a social and class compromise, in which (almost) all seemed to win. Until far into the 70s, the SPD (Social Democratic Party of Germany) was able to integrate large parts of the protest of 1968 and to translate it into social and democratic reforms.

20 years later, however, according to the results of a more recent élite study, the confidence had vanished, the consensus had been abandoned, and the contract had unilaterally been rescinded from the side of the ruling classes. The breakdown of the Soviet Union finally settled the fate of "the model" West Germany.

The results of politics – above all rising unemployment, growing insecurity and social exclusion, the crisis of the educational system and the rising costs of basic needs such as education and health – stood in contrast to the promises of the élites and the expectations of the citizens. The confidence that the parties and economic associations will be able to wing it, is gone today. People start to wonder, why they should delegate power to people, who seem completely incapable of solving the most obvious problems

The difference between population and elites, however, goes far beyond the question for capacities. A fundamental conflict has opened up between values and goals of the citizens, on the one hand, and the majority of the ruling elites on the other. From the standpoint of the elites, the new problems of the society, as they have surfaced with globalisation, individualisation, ageing of the population, exhaustion of natural resources and threat to internal and external security, can only be solved by a policy of comprehensive privatisation and market-form design of all social areas of life, the reduction of public social benefits and the redistribution from the bottom to the top – short: by a neoliberal policy. It includes mounting social pressure and a regime of insecurity and fear for job, pension and health care. And because it contradicts the interests of the majority of the population, it is being justified by material constraints impossible to be changed and is no longer generated by the democratic dialogue but in "expert commissions". The political scientists Franz Walter, in this context, talks about a "strange Trotskyism of the global classes" - neoliberal reforms as "changes in permanence,

against the will of the majority of the population.

In this deep conflict between rulers and the ruled, the citizens started, first of all, to use democratic elections as a weapon. The so often castigated voter abstention was such an instrument of battle. The respective government parties lost mainly because those, who formerly had voted for them, simply no longer went to the ballot boxes.

At the same time, more and more voters began to shift. Their goal was less the election of a policy that they could identify with – which was not at their disposal – but the throwing out of those currently governing in order to put them under pressure. Furthermore, the vote was used in protest.

The dissatisfaction with the ruling policy led, secondly, to a new wave of mobilisation in social movements and groups such as Attac Germany or the *Initiative for a policy change*. Beyond the large associations and parties, space was occupied to formulate alternatives, organise campaigns and mainly to enlighten oneself and others over the consequences of neoliberalism.

Many citizens have used a third democratic means in order to bring to bear their basic dissent with the ruling elites. The years 2003 and 2004 were marked by many demonstrations and mass demonstrations. Millions of people took to the streets against the new wars, the Agenda 2010, and the demolition of democracy. The most important wave of demonstration, however, came unexpectedly and spontaneously. Neither parties nor unions, nor the well-known social movements were the organisers, but the concerned themselves – it was the Monday demonstrations of summer and fall 2004 against the so-called Hartz reforms.¹

The Party of Democratic Socialism as a left-wing East German party

It is, in the European context, not unusual that a Communist party or even a ruling socialist state party transforms to the extent of becoming an influential ruling force of the present.² But it is unusual and particularly difficult in Germany. First of all, the ruling Communist party of the GDR, the SED, turned into PDS is a force, which is anchored only in this much smaller part of the country, the new federal regions. Second, it was also held liable for the deepening of the division of Germany, and the majority of the West Germans held and continue to hold only the Soviet Union and the GDR responsible for Cold War and dictatorship. Third, there was, upon joining the FRG, no longer any place for the former political and economic and cultural élites of the GDR.

However, how could this successor party emerge as one of the three large parties in East Germany? The PDS is by far, with a huge advance before all other parties, the most convincing interest representative of the East Germans. And far beyond this: The conflicts among the East Germans, on the one hand, and the ruling West German élite, on the other hand, were from the beginning on also conflicts over social justice and basic rights vs the imposition of highly monopolised markets and great power of companies. The struggle of many East Germans for their enterprises, for jobs, pensions, job placement and promotion, ground and real estate, buildings and apartments was a struggle for more social security and self-determination as well as for lived democracy. The unification was experienced by many as expropriation: They lost their jobs, real estate property, apartments and social benefits. In many areas, they were placed worse with respect to the West Germans. This conflict was understood, precisely because of the contradictory experiences in and with the GDR, increasingly also as a contradiction between socialist ideals and capitalist reality. This made it possible for the PDS to link practical interest politics in favour of the East Germans with their

¹ Compare on that the remarkable documentary movie by Martin Kessler “New rage” (www.neueWUT.de).

² See the in particular contributions by Dan Hough and by the author in: *For another Europe. Left Parties in the Upswing*, Berlin: Dietz 2005.

ideas of a democratic socialism.

In the end of the 1990ies the PDS came into crisis. The political agenda shifted from unification to neoliberal reforms. As an East German party the PDS had no chance to influence these process and it was not able to establish itself firmly in the West. A programmatic renewal was started and a new party program adopted in 2003. In clear distinction to any kind of old-fashioned Communist avant-gardism, it is being stressed. "The PDS wants to be part of a broad alliance, which is directed against a policy, whose goal it has been to achieve agreement with the economically mighty at the expense of the socially disadvantaged. We commit to overcoming the spiritual and political hegemony of neoliberal ideology and politics in Germany and in the European Union. We want to establish socialist policy for the duration as an independent self-determined political project, so that future-oriented democratic, social, and ecological alternatives may be brought to flourish. We are ready as a socialist party to participate for the duration in a middle-left alliance, which is aimed at such changes." This matches the expectations of the potential voters and voters of the Left Party.PDS. They expect of it, in their majority, first of all, a strong, left opposition. These goals only seem to find their real party-political foundation with the intention of PDS and WASG to found a common Left Party.

The Electoral Alternative – Labour and Social Justice (WASG)

Three factors influenced the emergence of a new left party in Germany in 2004 – the crisis of the SPD, the reorientation of the trade unions and the weakness of the PDS in Western Germany. The SPD had lost in the years of the chancellorship of Gerhard Schröder one third of its members, its leadership ruled against the larger part of its members and voters, especially against those who were allied with the trade unions. With the neoliberal shift of the SPD the trade unions had lost its most important partner in the parliament. And the PDs was not able to attract those who were disappointed by the SPD in the West.

These factors created the founding situation of the WASG. The electoral alternative was a reservoir of trade union- oriented left intellectuals, scientists and publicists with party backgrounds from the Greens, the SPD and the PDS. Their regional focus was the North of West Germany. An important role played groups of the metal workers trade union (IG Metall) from the Southwest of Germany.

The WASG produced a political profile, by which it could gather a large part of the various anti-neoliberal groups and strata. It placed the confrontation with neoliberal politics into the centre of its programme and strategy, hooked on to the breadth of the socio-critical debate, integrated alternative economic policy approaches and positions. It aimed at a German-wide parliamentary representation and a popular controversy over neoliberal politics. It represented personally and substantially left trade union positions, looked for contact to the social and globalisation-critical movements and networked with these. Ultimately, this profile and one's own claim were credibly presentable in the political space: the new political actors with their, in part, decade-long work in trade unions, science, parties and in the socio-critical debate in general stood for an alternative. It was believed that they would be able to fill the existing representational gaps and that they can, next to the existing political actors, legitimately occupy one part of the political space.

With this strategy, the WASG succeeded in addressing frustrated former members and voters of Red-Green as well as non-voters and fetch them back into the political confrontations in the Federal Republic. Internal differences in the questions of strategic alignment within the party spectrum and the organisational orientation as well as the shortcomings of party construction in the new federal regions, with the exception of Berlin, do not diminish the successes: the WASG has managed to establish itself with an election result of 2.2% at the regional elections in NRW³ out of nothing within 15 month as a factor in the Federal Republi-

³ Helge Mewes: Für eine neue Wahlpartei (For a new electoral party), paper given at May 24, 2005.

can party spectrum.

2. The emergence of a united left party

In 1990, it had been invoked, in the 90th, on the open lists of the PDS it was anticipated, with the foundation of the Electoral Alternative Work and Social Justice and the electoral successes of the PDS in the year 2004, it seemed to get closer, with the elections to the federal parliament in September 2005, it has taken concrete shape: the project of a strong Left party in Germany. Since the foundation of the USPD, the Independent Social Democratic Party of Germany, in April 1917, as the counter-force to a majority-SPD that said yes to the war, nothing like that has existed in this country: a strong left beyond Communists and Social Democrats.

On September 18, 2005, at the elections to the German Federal parliament, the Left Party.PDS received 8.7% of the votes and entered the new parliament with 54 deputies. In this way, it has shaken up the political relationship of forces in the Federal Republic in a lasting way. In 2002, it was precisely the failing of the PDS to take the five-percent hurdle that permitted chancellor Schröder the continuation of the Red-Green coalition. On September 18, 2005, however, the parliamentary relationships have changed. The Left Party is, with a gain in votes of 4.7% (!), the real winner of the election.

The Left Party disputes the SPD the pre-eminence among the Left, becomes the pioneer for social justice in Germany, stands for a change of direction away from neoliberalism and away from a steady militarisation of foreign policy. It was chosen disproportionately by unemployed and by workers. It incorporates the hope for a new economic and social policy, which enjoys great backing in the population, but which is completely alien to the political, economic, and intellectual “élites” of the country.

The Left Party, already since the moment of its appearance, still as a “spectre”, has begun to change the political landscape of the Federal Republic. This success creates an obligation. In its programmatic founding document, it has set itself the following “strategic goals”:

- “confrontation with the ideology of neoliberalism and development of alternatives”;
- alliance against neoliberalism in society that “brings together highly qualified employees and core teams as well as workers in insecure and part-time work relationships as well as unemployed, independent and socially oriented entrepreneurs”;
- strategic cooperation “with strong forces in the trade unions, globalisation-critical and other social movements, with socio-critical initiatives and progressive representatives from science and culture active against neoliberalism as well as all relationships of subordination in society”;
- the link between extra-parliamentary and parliamentary work;
- the unity of social protest, development of alternatives and transformative claim;
- government participations as a “means of political action and participation in the shaping of society if the necessary conditions for that are given and if the Left profiles itself with alternative left projects in a publicly recognisable way”⁴;
- parliamentary alliances with other political forces;
- action in the Party of the European Left.⁵

⁴ On this disputed point it says: “Standards for governmental participation are the improvement of the position of the disadvantaged and the strengthening of political participation, the imposition of alternative projects and reform intentions. It must promote the change of the relationship of forces towards the left and the introduction of a policy change. However, THE LEFT will only enter coalitions with other parties if its basic principles are respected. Public existential services should not be privatised. THE LEFT in governments will commit itself, so that public services for women and men citizens won’t be worsened by personnel reduction and to prevent the cut-back of social services by all its forces. THE LEFT is – also in government – only as strong as it is anchored in society and receives public support. Left policies need fuelling criticism, public pressure, and extra-parliamentary mobilisation.”

The journey that the so colourfully mixed Left begins with this Party project will hopefully resemble the journey, of which Ernst Bloch wrote with great anticipation in his young years that it should be a journey of departure, aimed at a point of upheaval: "Pain, darkness, crackling ice, calm of the seas and happy journey lie around that spot. Where it is, there rises, when breakthrough succeeds, the country, where nobody has been yet, yes, that has not even been yet itself. And that needs man, wanderer, compass, depth in the land at the same time."

In spring 2007 PDS and WASG have finished its unification. Oskar Lafontaine and Lothar Bisky became the co-chairmen. A statute and preliminary program were adopted. In the opinion polls THE LEFT gains about ten to twelve percent (and about 25 to 30 percent in the East). 2007 it was able to enter for the first time a regional parliament in the West – in Bremen. The new party has itself established firmly in the political system of Germany.

There are five factors which in their sum can generate sudden political changes – economic collapses, distrust face to social institutions, the solidarity of various social groups against the rulers, an ideology that effectively challenges the rulers, and finally, the division among the ruling classes themselves.⁶ Due to the crisis of neoliberalism, a number of conditions for such a political change have emerged in Germany. There is deep pessimism concerning one's own life perspective among large parts of the populations, a strong difference felt from the institutions of the Federal Republic that are seen mainly as instruments for the exercise of power of the privileged classes.

In the end of the year 2006, two thirds of the population had the opinion that things were unjust in the Federal Republic; a third saw themselves on the loser's side. For the first time, more citizens were dissatisfied with the functioning of democracy in Germany than were satisfied.⁷ The economic recovery reached mainly the better-placed. Almost all were threatened by the general insecurity. The ideology of neoliberalism has gotten into disrepute, even among the rulers. The "course of the world" can be stopped. However, the conditions necessary for that yet have to be created.

The Hartz reforms were what brought the break. Now, 440,000 people received Hartz IV even though they were employed full-time; many others were assigned the infamous "mini jobs". That way, it became clear to ever more people that a policy against the working people was being made here. From resignation, there grew the readiness for protest and the search for political and economic alternatives. The citizens, men and women, started moving. There dissatisfaction stopped being mere resignation

All of these are indispensable pre-conditions of a socio-ecological and democratic change of direction. They result from the disintegration of neoliberalism and weaken or negate its claims. It is the task of the LEFT to contribute also to the positive elements for a social and democratic change of direction of politics – especially the creation of broad social and political alliances and the awareness of meaningful productive alternative to today's misery. And it also has to be a matter of breaking up the neoliberal unitary front of the ruling elites. There are chances for that: "Because also the bourgeois camp in this erosion process... does not keep its structural capacity for hegemony and becomes increasingly inconsistent. We may prepare... for a growing contradiction between the imperatives of a neoliberal ideology and the real... conditions."⁸ The LEFT was able to get public recognition for its role in the political

⁵ http://die-linke.de/partei/dokumente/programmatische_eckpunkte/iv_fuer_einen_richtungswechsel/.

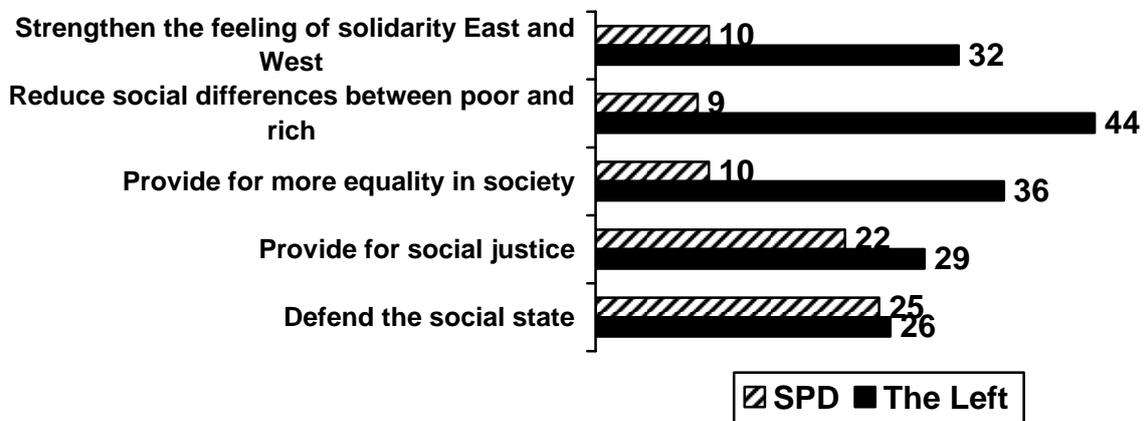
⁶ Theda Skocpol: States and Social Revolutions: A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia, and China, New York 1979; Kurt Lenk: Theories of Revolution, Munich 1981.

⁷ ARD-GermanyTREND November 2006 (<http://www.infratest-dimap.de/download/dt0611.pdf>). Precisely under centre-left governments in other countries, however, the appreciation of democratic institutions has clearly improved.

⁸ Joachim Bischoff: Future of financial market capitalism. Structures, contradictions, alternatives.

system (see graph 1).

**Graph 1: Who cares more...? (Population as a whole, in %)
(FAZ, July 18, 2007, 2.5)**



3. Possibilities of the centre-left alliance

Quite different from what one usually suspects: If you look at essential attitudes on economy and politics, society is split in the upper tiers and united at the bottom. That is one of results of the study “Society in the Reform Process” conducted by Infratest Social Research Berlin on behalf of the Friedrich Ebert Foundation. On the basis of qualitative interviews and quantified questions, there were made statements on nine political milieus in Germany, which in the following will be presented very briefly with respect to their social position⁹ (Table 1).

Four of these milieus are attributed to a very broadly conceived upper middle-class (45 percent of the population), two to the lower middle-class of society (29 percent) and three to the lower part. The main criterion seems to be the question to what extent the respective group by education, work, income, social capital etc. seems relatively more resistant towards an immediately threatening decline (upper middle-class), sees itself threatened (middle) or respectively finds itself at the bottom without realistic chance of getting up. The data raised in 2006 yield a relatively precise impression of the present attitudes of important political and social groups in the population. What is missing are the small, but extremely influential groups of the ruling elite in business, politics, law, culture and security apparatuses. They make up the real top, controlling the society.¹⁰ In the following, there is used for these groups the term “upper middle-class”, because it is in reality a case of socially relatively well situated strata that belong in no way to the rulers in the narrower sense, but at most to the managers of capitalism in general. For the middle tiers, there is used the term “lower middle-class”.

Hamburg 2006, p. 185.

⁹ Compare on that in more detail: Neugebauer, Gero: Political Milieus in Germany. The Study by the Friedrich Ebert-Foundation, Bonn: J.H.W. Dietz & successors Publishers 2007, pp. 70 ff. as well as: Rita Müller-Hilmer: Society in the Reform Process. Friedrich-Ebert-Foundation 2006 (www.fes.de/inhalt/Dokumente/061017_Gesellschaft_im_Reformprozess_komplett.pdf, p. 20 ff.).

¹⁰ Hans-Jürgen Krysmanski: Shepherds and wolves: how money and power elites seize the world or: Invitation to Power Structure Research, Münster 2004.

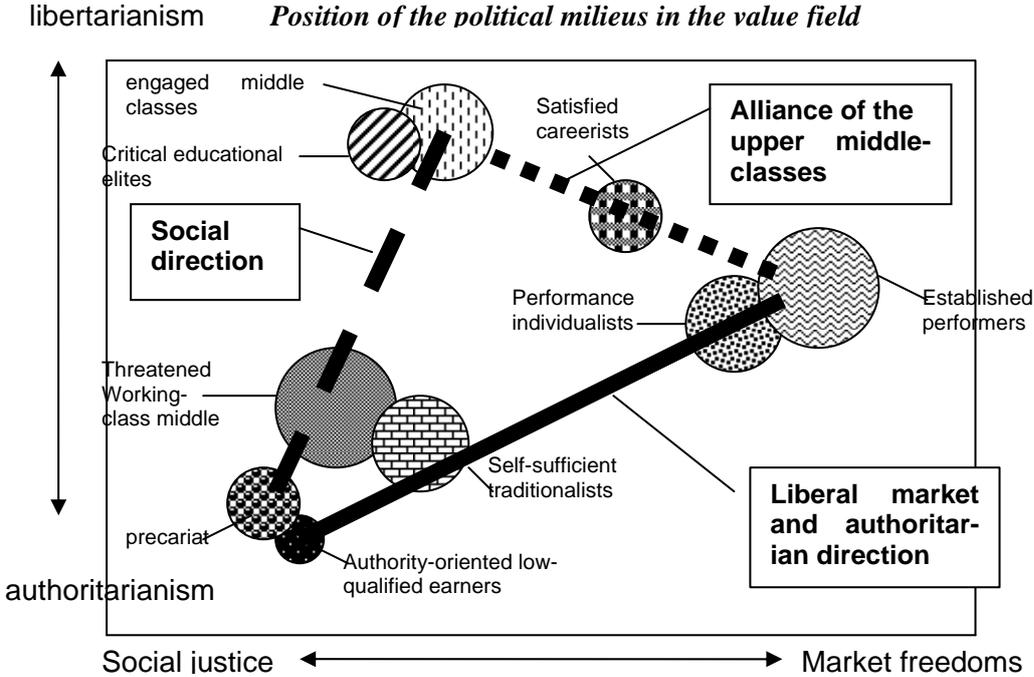
Table 1: Political milieus in Germany (following social criteria and by mentioning their share of the total population)¹¹

Upper Middle-Classes	Performance individualists 11%	High social status, high qualification, often leading functions in private business, many independent professionals, high share of men, strong professional self-determination, high income, often private old-age insurance Material orientation, striving for freedom and independence, orientation towards performance and closing-off from solidary and traditional values
	Established performers 15%	High social status, many specialised workers, managers, masters Good financial situation, far-reaching professional self-determination, professional satisfaction Material orientation, high satisfaction, strong performance orientation; enemy of state intervention, hardly any orientation from social values
	Critical educational Elites 9%	Highest social status and education, often in service jobs Highest household net income, strong professional self-determination and mobility Open for social transformation; want open tolerant and in particular solidary society, wage on providing and regulating state
	Engaged middle classes 10%	High social status, high education, many employees in public service and in socio-cultural professions High income, high satisfaction and security Open for change, want open and above all solidary society, want providing state and condemn social abuse, in part strongly religiously oriented
Lower Middle-Classes	Satisfied Careerists 13%	Middle-level social status, risen from simple backgrounds Highest professional satisfaction, a lot of individual initiative in professional life Somewhat above-average income and high financial satisfaction, see themselves on the winners' side In favour of free play of market forces and at the same time expectation of a maximum in social transfers, at the same time achievement-bound and solidary
	Threatened working class middle 16%	Middle social status, simple to middle educational level Specialised workers and simple employees Lower professional scopes for manoeuvre and traditional understanding of labour (wage, security, regulated work schedules) Slightly below-average income, high insecurity, wish for regulating state that guarantees comprehensive social security, react to insecurity rather with authoritarian-ethnocentric ideas
Lower Classes	Self-sufficient traditionalists 11%	Rather low status, often from lower classes, often simple educational level, many pensioners, many women Low expectations from work and low satisfaction Far below-average income, strong insecurity Want a state committed to the common weal, condemn social abuse, frequently authoritarian-ethnocentric attitudes
	Authority-oriented low-qualified working people 7%	Rather low status, often reached "career" at a very small level, many pensioners and women Simple work, low educational achievement, frequently confronted with unemployment, relative professional satisfaction Far below-average income, often dependent on state transfer, fear of loss of their modest prosperity Life is experienced as a struggle, strong insecurity and challenge by society, authority fixation and withdrawal, Strong authoritarian-ethnocentric disposition, see polarisation in rich and poor
	Decoupled <i>Precariat</i> 8%	Low social status, often experience of social decline, highest share of unemployment, 25% of the population in the East of Germany Often simple and medium-level work, strong insecurity and dissatisfaction Strong financial insecurity, often indebted, great fears of the future, feel on the margins and as losers, low self-determination Wish for common-weal oriented society and regulating state, react with pronounced ethno-centrism to insecurity

¹¹ Status relates to family background. That way it becomes clear that members of the "critical educational elite" come largely from families with completed higher education and earn well.

As graph 2 illustrates, majorities in Germany can be reached in three ways. *First*, it can come to an alliance of the upper middle-classes in which the liberal market and the social libertarian groups join forces. The neoliberal project itself began mainly with the transition from the hegemony of the social-libertarian elites of the late 60s and early 70s to the élites oriented more towards the liberal market and authority of the 80s and 90s. The mutation of the SPD from Willy Brandt by way Helmut Schmidt to the basta! chancellor of the Agenda 2010, Gerhard Schröder, is maybe the clearest expression of this change of hegemony.

Graph 2: Alternative majorities for decisions on basic directions



The neoliberally dominated alliance of the power elites with the upper middle classes was put into question by the medium and lower social groups. They saw their interests massively hurt. The “new middle” threw no bridge between the top and the bottom, but demanded that those below converted from social state citizens into “working poor”. They were supposed to prepare the lacking public services for the well-to-do at poverty wages as private services of child care, old-age care etc. In between 2000 and the year 2006, the gross wage quota sank from 72.2 percent to 65.2 percent, while the gross profit quota jumped upwards from 27.8 percent to 36 percent.¹² The wage quota in Germany had never been as low since 1945.

In 2005, the sum of gross wages and incomes for the first time since 1967 sank below the level of the preceding year (by 0.7 percent), while national income increased by 1.5% and accordingly was redistributed to the benefit of the businesses and the well-to-do. The poverty quota under Red-Green (!) increased from 12.1% in the year 1998 to 17.4% in the year 2005. The reduction of the core teams, the extension of time work and other forms of precarious employment, the cuts in social benefits and pensions produced among the medium and lower groups a social atmosphere that turned ever more fiercely against leading policy. They saw themselves confronted with a wave of expropriations in favour of the income earners. In West Germany, the approval to the question: “Do you consider socialism a good idea that was badly executed?” rose from 30% in the year 2000 to 45% in the year 2007.¹³

With regard to the popular rejection of neoliberalism the conservatives are trying to formulate

¹² Claus Schäfer: Without remorse – the policy of hypocrisy – on the development of income distribution. WSI Communications 11/2006, p. 583.

¹³ Thomas Peters: The magic sound of socialism. In: FAZ of July 18, 2007, p. 5.

an own new answer. Departing from the interests and attitudes of the “established performers” of private economy disposed in a neoliberal way, the middle and bottom groups are offered a *new social contract* – subordination under performance criteria of the market economy against increased state provision of conditions that allow to do justice to these criteria. This social contract is a contract of rule that is offered in order to counteract the protest of the women and men citizens. The state is supposed to make the society more “permeable” for those who are ready for that. Out of the large group of the excluded, marginalised and precarious, there come agents of functional services for the established performers, in the private households just as in a state-sponsored low-wage sector. Profits from growth should also flow into increased state incomes in order to finance public tasks that are growing again, including increased public investment. The age of complete wage restraint was declared as finished even by the FDP.

The SPD – under the pressure of the anticipated re-elections it had to call – executed a turn back to the rediscovery of the social question. Within the ruling coalition, the SPD in a number of questions (minimum wage, savings allowances for working people, health reform) has pushed half-heartedly and without great resolution for solutions that in comparison to the CDU ideas put their stakes on greater state regulation. On the one hand, the continuity to the Agenda 2010 is emphasised, the corporate tax reform supported, and on the other hand, the inheritance tax reform demanded. Renewal in conformity with the market and justice continue to be the guiding orientations of the SPD. This includes the real dominance of neoliberal economy. At the same time, however, basic security, future investments and a well-performing state are demanded that are supposed to harness the “centrifugal force” of the market. The Greens shifted to the left as well.

As Table 2 shows, on the basis of the research results published by Gero Neugebauer, there open up federal coalition possibilities that can concentrate on respectively different points of emphasis in the respective groups of the upper middle classes, the lower middle classes and the lower classes. A Centre-Right coalition composed of CDU/CSU and FDP by contrast is strongly overrepresented among the neoliberal elites, a Centre-Left coalition by contrast among the social-libertarian elites. The first has significantly more adherents among the “satisfied careerists”, the latter more among the “threatened working people middle”. Centre-Left has less support among the lower groups, especially among the “decoupled or cut-off precariat” that elects the Left Party at a disproportionately high level.

Table 2: Party policy coalitions and milieus (on the basis of: Gero Neugebauer: Political Milieus, opus cit., p. 103)

Political Milieus	CDU/CSU and FDP	SPD, Greens, and LP	Grand coalition	CDU/CSU, FDP, and Greens	SPD, Greens and FDP
(1) Performance individualists	4.84	3.85	6.49	5.39	4.18
(2) Established performers	8.1	3.75	10.2	8.55	4.35
<i>“Neoliberal groups” (1 and 2)</i>	12.94	7.6	16.69	13.94	8.53
(3) Critical educational élites	1.17	6.39	3.97	3.69	4.86
engaged middle classes	2.9	5.5	5.7	4.5	4.8
<i>“social-</i>					

<i>libertarian groups" (3 and 4)</i>	4.07	11.89	9.67	8.19	9.66
Upper third of society as a whole	17.01	19.49	26.36	22.13	18.19
(5) Satisfied Careerists	6.11	4.68	8.84	6.76	4.16
(6) Threatened working-people middle	4.96	7.36	8.64	5.6	5.28
Middle third of society as a whole	11.07	12.04	17.48	12.36	9.44
(7) Self-sufficient Traditionalists	4.07	3.85	6.6	4.51	3.41
(8) Authority-oriented low-skilled people	2.45	2.45	4.13	2.45	2.73
(9) Cut-off precariat	1.44	3.52	2.16	1.68	1.6
Lower third of society As a whole	7.96	9.82	12.89	8.64	7.74
Coalition approval in % of those	36.04	41.35	56.73	43.13	35.37

4. Alternative Reforms

“Historically progressive”, thus Wolfgang Fritz Haug in the *Historical-Critical Dictionary of Marxism* with reference to Antonio Gramsci, “a class formation is thanks to its historical ‘productivity’, meaning the expansion of a concrete political and economic regime it carries, thanks to which it drives ahead ‘the whole society, by not only addressing existential needs, but by enlarging its leading cadres through constant exploration of new industrial productive sectors of activity’ and that way fuels the credible expectations of individual ‘life perspectives’.”¹⁴

What projects can drive ahead society, address its existential requirements and mainly explore new productive sectors of activity and that way enlarge the individual life perspective especially of those groups that might possibly support such a change of direction? The existential significance of these projects might hardly be in question; however, are they productive as well? Do they create more freedom, self-determination, conditions for individual creativity and lively community? Can there be founded on them a formation of forces that is capable of re-fashioning action and can also suffer strong conflicts, or is reality really “immune against all attempts to shape our life together in a more human way”¹⁵?

¹⁴ HCDM, Vol. 6/I, p. 14 f.

¹⁵ Zygmunt Baumann: *Life in fleeing modernity*. Frankfurt-am-Main 2007, p. 109.

Is there the possibility to challenge neoliberalism and financial-market capitalism by “counter-hegemonic practices that try to analyse existing order in order to establish another form of hegemony”¹⁶? If it is correct that the “social humus on which the new Left can flourish is the epidemic fear of decline no longer controlled by any credible promise of ‘information society’ or globalisation and the increasing worry about the accelerated disintegration of civil society”¹⁷, what are then the positive responses?

How can we address the general insecurity that for almost all women and men citizens has developed from the fact that social groups were created to whom the access to the basic goods of a dignified life is blocked? How can the “*political economy of insecurity*” (Zygmunt Baumann) be overcome that has developed from the de-regulation of the economy and makes intervening action so difficult?¹⁸

What could projects consist in that would link the broader social bottom and the lower middle classes of the threatened women and men workers as well as the employees with those groups that are called “involved bourgeoisie” and “critical educational elites”? What connection do they together have to a “solar revolution” and the solidary commitment to global social rights? And how does all of that secure the transition from neoliberal authoritarianism, de-regulation and privatisation as “material constraint”, to serious democratisation and broad participation?

Who wants to seriously confront the lower class-problem, the question of sub-proletarians of the present, must change simultaneously the exercise of power, social and economic policy. Lutz Brangsch writes on that: “We will be confronted increasingly with a disintegration of society on the one hand, and tendencies of growing repression on the other. Before this background the fusion of demands for democratisation as political, for a realisation of poverty-proof social security system as social policy, and active employment and structural policy as economic policy corner stone is necessary. A developed network of public services that are offered free of discrimination and repression (education, culture, public transport...) is a decisive moment of such a counter-strategy.”¹⁹

If this is correct, then the most important common project of a socio-ecological transformation could be the renewal of the public sectors. In that context, there would belong the extension of democratic community life, the development of education, culture, health care and care as core tasks of living communities and backbone of self-determined shaping of individual and partner-like life. They represent the actual “core scaffold” of a life in freedom.²⁰

Reclaim the public! Re-appropriate the public community systems! - That should be the common slogan of the many different forces struggling for the social-ecological change of direction. In that connection, it would show itself that this is at the same time the basis of an innovative and dynamic economic development that integrates society and keeps nature intact.

¹⁶ Chantal Mouffe in a conversation with Elke Wagner. In: Heinrich Geiselberger: *And now?*, opus cit., p. 109.

¹⁷ Ingar Solty: Transformation of the German party system and European historical responsibility of the Left Party. Opus cit., p. 341.

¹⁸ “Today, in the era of triumphant capitalism... one can say that the rest of human society can only be liberated of the milieu of fear, of the anxiety and powerlessness surrounding it, if its poorest part is liberated from its misery.” Zygmunt Baumann: *The crisis of politics. Boon and bane of a new public.* Hamburg 2000, p. 251.

¹⁹ Lutz Brangsch: Perspectives of the social – strategic questions. About the production of the “substrata” in Germany – Why this discussion precisely now? rls, December 2006 (<http://www.rosalux.de/cms/index.php?id=4613>).

²⁰ One of the few German-language general analyses of the public is given in: Stephan A. Jansen; Birger P. Priddat; Nico Stehr (eds.): *The Future of the Public. Multi-disciplinary perspectives for an opening of the discussion about the public.* Wiesbaden 2007.

The prerequisites for a socio-political change of direction can be created. To that effect, many actors are needed. The party *The Left* is only one of them – be it an important one. However, how is the Left Party itself prepared for contributing successfully to a change of direction? That still needs to show itself. Will it learn to hold successfully against the wind and to set its course self-confidently and to hold it – aiming at the urgently required change of direction of social policy in Germany and Europe?²¹

For that, what is needed is the art of radical real politics. This connection of radicalism and realism links up with the search for a new policy like Rosa Luxemburg started it at the end of the 19th century in order to overcome the contrast between reformism and waiting for the revolution. She called it “a *revolutionary realpolitik* in the fullest sense of both words.”²²

²¹ Clarity about the direction is the prerequisite for every concrete determination of strategy. Compare on that: Joachim Raschke: Political strategy: Thoughts on a political and political science concept. In: Frank Nullmeier; Thomas Saretzki: Beyond daily life in government. Strategic capabilities of political parties. Frankfurt and New York: Campus Publishers 2002, p. 216 f.

²² Rosa Luxemburg. Karl Marx. Works, Vol. 1.2, p. 373.