


# global solidarity

MALDEKSTRA INTERNATIONAL 2020



The world is in disarray: social divisions, inequality, economic crisis, the climate catastrophe and the rise of a new authoritarianism all challenge the very foundations of civilization. Saying that capitalism offers no answers is not enough. We need effective alternatives, alternative experiments, more democracy, and socialist discussions. But there is another truth that is particularly evident amidst the Covid-19 pandemic: the challenges of a global world cannot be solved at the national level alone. Whether it is a matter of addressing the climate crisis, of the necessary restructuring of production methods, or of the worldwide fight for social justice: leftist forces in societies right around the world—in all their diversity, with their regional knowledge and experiences in local struggles for a better world—must rediscover internationalism and renew it from the bottom up.



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# In spite of everything

A cancelled congress.  
An ongoing debate. Editorial

The Covid-19 pandemic has confronted us all with major challenges, some of which are still unknown. It is affecting not only our everyday life and our political thought, it is also affecting our work. Under the constraints of the pandemic, projects must be postponed, plans must be changed. At the end of May 2020 we intended to discuss “global solidarity” at a major international congress in Leipzig. We invited activists, intellectuals, politicians, and cultural workers from all over the world to discuss the possibilities for a “new internationalism”.

There are more than enough reasons for this endeavour. Nationalist parties and authoritarian governments are on the rise around the world. Leftists are seeking responses to this situation through new global struggles, such as campaigns for the rights of women, minorities, and workers. The debate over a “new internationalism” is also already underway; it involves global cooperation from below, a perspective of praxis that focuses less on statehood and more on the transnational solidarity of the many. The necessity of this debate has once again been underscored by current controversies, for example on questions regarding migration, or the political arenas in which progressive forces are concentrated. It is not a matter of formulating ready-made recipes or conclusive answers, but of asking the right questions, of being curious about new responses. What are the challenges of this “new internationalism”, who are its protagonists? And how does the debate today relate to the long leftist tradition of international perspectives?

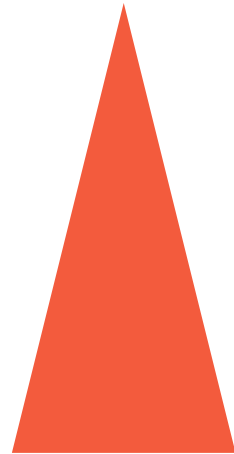
And then the pandemic broke out, forcing us to cancel the congress in Leipzig. However, the planned special edition of maldekstra international will still be published. In the era of the Covid-19 pandemic, it is more important than ever to make progress in terms of analysis and praxis. It is true that many governments are currently also calling for solidarity in the face of the Covid-19 crisis. However, in doing so, they only rarely refer to fair conditions for global trade, or to the collective fight for the environment and against the growing right-wing populism. These and many other questions and challenges require global answers and internationalist solutions. The present publication presents various standpoints for discussion, sheds light on practical attempts at global solidarity, and discusses aspects of both old and new internationalisms. Our congress cannot take place, but the debate continues.

*Boris Kanzleiter, Hana Pfennig, Kathrin Gerlof, and Tom Strohschneider*

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Some of the texts collected in this issue have already been published in previous issues of “maldekstra”. A part of the articles were written for this issue before the Corona crisis, another part has already been written under the impression of the pandemic. Further texts, statements and interviews can be found in our online dossier Global Solidarity at: [rosalux.de/dossiers/global-solidaritaet](https://rosalux.de/dossiers/global-solidaritaet)

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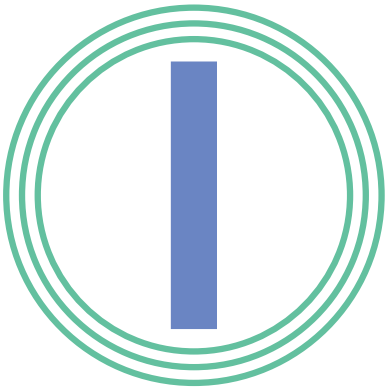
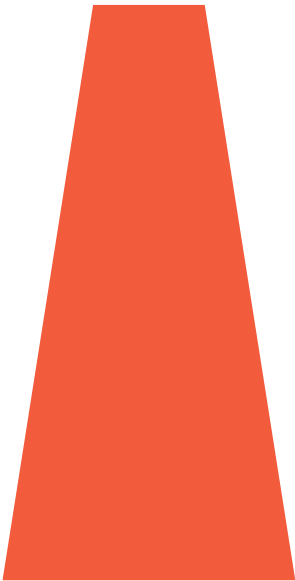
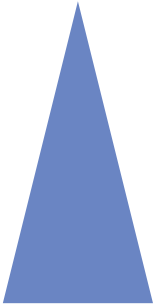
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# Not to be forgotten again

On solidarity in the era of coronavirus, the political economy of global inequality, and what comes after the pandemic By Sabine Nuss

Whoever tries to write about the coronavirus pandemic as it unfolds will find that in respect to many topics they are chasing after a present that is constantly racing away. The number of victims, the rate at which the disease is spreading, countermeasures being taken, political debates about them, the intensity with which social and political contradictions are now multiplying: all of this is putting us under pressure. And not only as observers: we are not untouched by the world, we have relatives, we have our own worries, we are living under hitherto unseen constraints.

And at the same time the coronavirus pandemic raises pressing new questions and updates existing ones. When the pandemic struck with full force here in Germany, Angela Merkel said that “our solidarity, our reason, and our good will for one another” are being “put to the test”. And she, the Chancellor, hoped that we would pass this test. But how much solidarity can there be in a society whose social relations are based on competition, whose credo is “everyone for themselves”? And what kind of solidarity are we talking about?

Solidarity means “to be responsible for one another”; “in solidarity” is used in the sense of “standing together for something, being bound together”; “to act in solidarity” means to band together with someone to realize common interests and goals. When Bertolt Brecht wrote the ‘Solidarity Song’ for the film *Kuhle Wampe*, with its well-known refrain—“Onwards and never forget: solidarity!”—he was not thinking of all of the inhabitants of one or of every country. It was a matter of solidarity among the poor, workers, the unemployed, those left behind, in the context of the Great Depression.

This is different from cooperation, charity, or philanthropy. These don’t necessarily entail common political goals, any kind of struggle, a more powerful opponent, or any consciousness of social contradictions, and of the possibility of altering them so as to make aid and alms superfluous. But solidarity does entail an opposition: who or what are we opposing by joining forces, where do our common interests lie? In this light, the powerful, common enemy in the current pandemic would seem to be the virus. The common goal, behind which everyone joins forces, that of hindering its rapid spread and conserving the capacities of the health system so it can save lives. To this end people are avoiding personal contact, not meeting up in person, and not going to the pub; to this end people are staying at home, engaging in social distancing. Those who are able to are taking care of those for whom isolation or quarantine are more difficult. They are doing this collectively, in neighbourly ways, selflessly. The positive aspect of the crisis, we often hear, is the extent to which people are showing solidarity

with one another, because the coronavirus pandemic is a serious ordeal for “our society”.

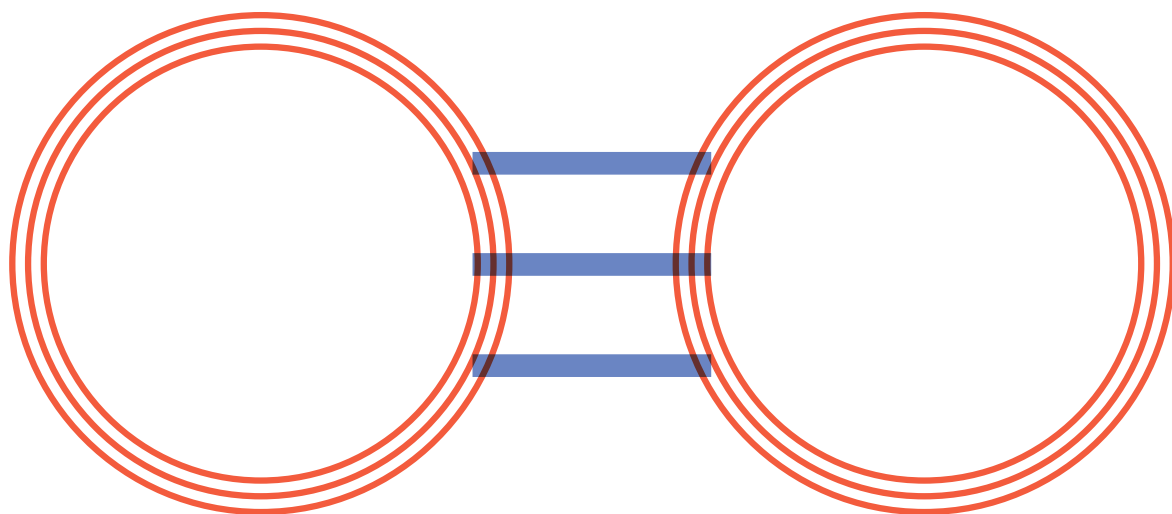
But what is lost in this opposition between a “we” and a viral “opponent”, is the fact that the crisis does not affect everyone equally. And there are reasons for this. Quite apart from the fact that a pandemic would be a huge challenge for any type of society, the coronavirus pandemic does not present us with common human or “social” problems, but specific, capitalist ones. For example, there is currently a lot of reporting on how cost cutting has damaged the health system, and how that is now coming back to bite us. We have allowed the treatment of the sick to be subordinated to an economic logic, with hospitals being forced to generate revenue, make profits, and above all work “efficiently”. And that means having no excess capacity on hand and reducing emergency reserves to as close to zero as possible, because they only cost money.

“Economic efficiency” was the killer argument not only in the health sector; it has also been used to legitimate the privatization of all kinds of public services worldwide, especially in the last three decades. We now know that economic efficiency has led to a worsening of working conditions, lower wages, and a transfer of public wealth into private hands. Inequality researcher Thomas Piketty has argued that privatization is one of the primary reasons for the widening gap between rich and poor in recent years.

“Economic efficiency” also refers to a very particular kind of economy—namely, one in which efficiency is considered to have been achieved when capital is valorized as rapidly and intensively as possible. This not only presupposes a division between those with more and those with less, it also produces that division, to a historically and regionally varying degree.

And this is only becoming ever more clear at the international level. The pandemic threatens people in poorer countries in a completely different way. In Africa, around 70 percent of people have no savings. In the event of a shutdown they face far more pressing worries than a run on toilet paper. According to the Christian NGO Misereor, Bolivia as a whole has only 235 beds available for people with coronavirus, of which only 35 are for those seriously ill. International aid projects have been blocked or shut down as a result of the crisis. A global race has begun to obtain ever scarcer medical resources, one which rich nations will obviously win. And the coronavirus has also made clear that the threat of illness is not the same for everybody. South African human rights activist Mark Heywood has reminded us how little is done when “only” marginalized parts of the population are threatened, or when a health crisis occurs in regions impoverished by capital. To say nothing of





the conditions refugees are currently being forced to survive in. The coronavirus pandemic is an accusation, and a warning that it is not enough to merely talk about international solidarity; it must also be practiced.

The pandemic reveals vulnerabilities that are not only medically but also economically differentiated. This is becoming particularly and painfully evident for many people in the present crisis. In a capitalist market economy, goods are distributed through the circulation of commodities and money, and the production of these goods is organized around the exchange of “labour power for money”. Capitalist growth depends upon the smooth functioning of this circulation. During the coronavirus pandemic—which is historically exceptional—the state is interrupting this circulation in a very targeted way in order to halt the spread of the virus. But that has consequences which are by no means the same for all.

What this and other crises often reveal is the fact that those who are dependent on wages have no property. Many are now voicing their economic, and therefore existential precarity; they do not know how they will pay their rent if they receive no more commissions or wages. This is the paradox of our economy: on the one hand we are mutually dependent upon each other, in that we must cooperate through the everyday division of labour. But at the same time we are opposed to and in competition with one another. Capitalist efficiency, which is measured only in yields of capital, has separated the members of society into poor and rich, buyer and seller, worker and employer, payer and payee, employed and unemployed, debtor and creditor, owner and non-owner.

And so in the crisis, those who only look out for themselves have proceeded entirely according to the logic of their world of experience: first come first

served, buying up all the toilet paper, being “smart” by speculating on face masks or stealing them—even if this prevents other people from saving lives; those who have money fly in private jets, receive the sought-after ventilator, speculate on the suffering of others, hoard.

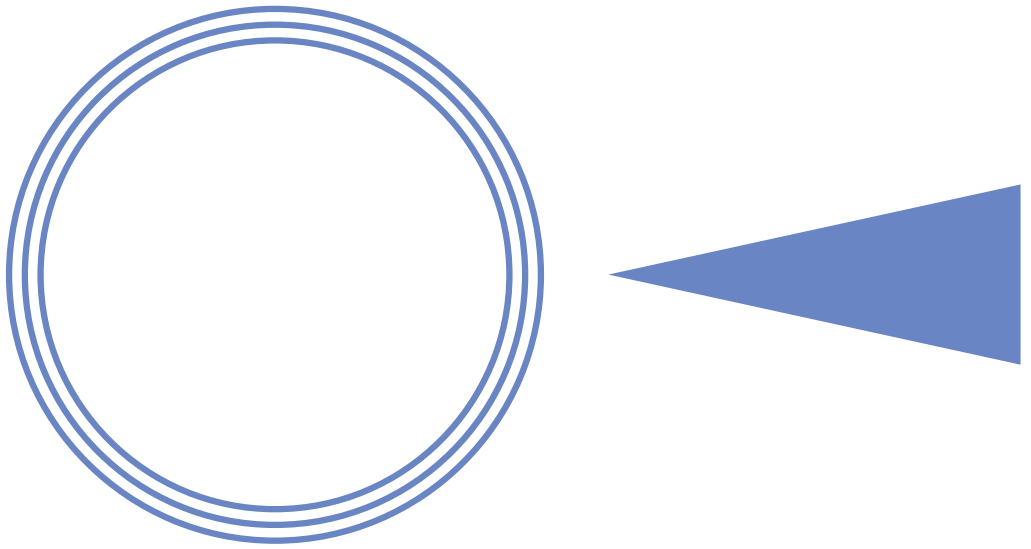
Consideration for others? Taking responsibility for the greater whole, being willing to help out? To be sure, these things are also being demanded occasionally. But it is not enough. A society in which individuals get the message that it is a matter of “all against all”—in which some are left behind and others are forced onto a hamster wheel that takes them to the limits of what their psyche can bear, while others no longer know where they should invest their capital so that it can grow to grotesque proportions—such a society desperately needs a call to higher values, it needs the glue that its heart is crying for, it needs a glue capable of bringing the splintered, unequally endowed, competing individuals together.

Yes, our reason and our feeling for one another demand that together we muster all possible consideration for others, good will, and responsibility, in order to put an end to the pandemic and protect as many people as possible. Let’s act in solidarity with one another. But that solidarity has to stay with us when this horrific episode is over, when people take to the streets, when they strike for higher wages and better working conditions, for more staff and a better quality of life, for a comprehensive public service, for an environmentally-friendly economy that serves human beings rather than capital. We are going to face powerful opponents. Therefore—onwards, and always remember: solidarity.

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Translation by Marty Hiatt and Sam Langer, Gegensatz Translation Collective





## “We need an internationalist perspective more than ever”

Michael Nassen Smith on global solidarity in the pandemic

*The corona crisis is ultimately of a global nature. Nevertheless, the measures to stop the spread of COVID-19 take place mainly within the framework of the nation-state. How do you assess this?*

The corona crisis is revealing the true extent and depth of our global interconnectedness in vivid terms. Nevertheless, the initial response to the crisis will have to emanate through national policy frameworks of nation-states. But this is no ordinary event: the conditions under which the crisis has been exacerbated are global in nature, and thus so are the solutions. The capacity and nature of each national response is predicated on global economic and political realities.

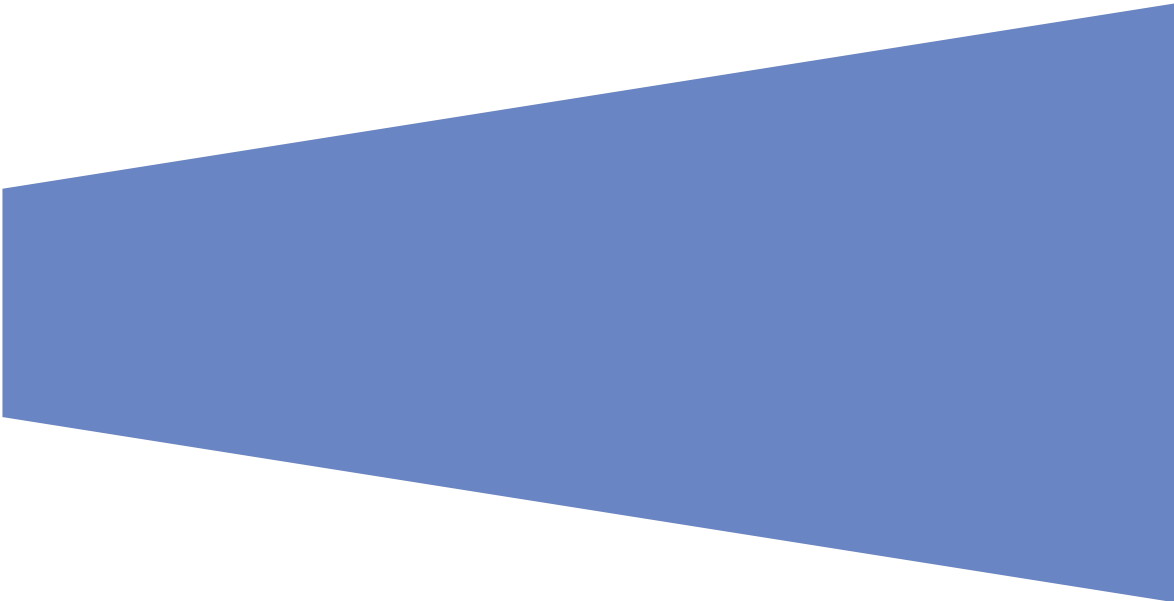
*In many articles covering the crisis, whether in Europe or Africa, “solidarity” plays a major role. But what role does global solidarity actually play?*  
When we speak of solidarity, we need to be clear about what this actually entails, lest we lose ourselves in an empty moralism. For example, when big

business comes together to devise solutions to the crisis, this represents a form of solidarity, albeit for the rich and powerful. What is urgently required now is a people’s solidarity.

There is also the kind of solidarity needed to sustain communities at this point in time, like caring for frail or older family member and neighbours or volunteering to participate in the mammoth public health efforts to fight the pandemic. We need to sew this communal ethic we see on a micro level into the very fabric of global governance institutions.

*But how could that happen given such unequal economic potential between countries? Even if the political will is there, are there limits to state implementation?*  
A successful fight against this crisis could demonstrate what a people’s solidarity can achieve; that it is indeed possible to collectively determine our own fate, to stand side-by-side with one another in the face of dire social challenges. The real task of the Left is to inject a sense of





confidence in the idea that a future society can be governed in this way.

That brings me to the question of politics. We must communicate to the public that the COVID-19 crisis has been exacerbated by neoliberal economic governance and the inequities it generates. The crisis has exposed what underfunding and austerity have done to countries across the globe. The class, racial, and gender divisions and inequities that define the global system will now be brought into sharp relief.

We shouldn't be surprised that a pandemic like this has returned, considering what occurred with SARS only a decade ago. Why weren't labs put to work to find vaccines and solutions? Why are hospitals not equipped and ready to treat the public? Of course, things are not the same everywhere. Germany, for example—South Korea and China are others—possesses a health infrastructure that can handle the crisis far better due to timely state intervention and a better state of preparedness. Poorer countries in the Global South are

being hardest hit and are likely to spiral in the upcoming weeks.

The crisis before us reveals a stark market failure, rooted in the privatization of healthcare and the neglect of public infrastructure—turning a service fundamental to meeting human rights to a source of profit. In that sense, global solidarity must translate into a movement to challenge neoliberal global capitalism.

This cannot be achieved should the trend toward isolation and narrow nationalism continue. The Left has always been about international solidarity, although in recent years there has been some equivocation on the issue. The idea of the Left, of socialism, is incoherent without an internationalist perspective. We need this perspective now more than ever.

*Many NGOs in the North are calling for debt relief for the countries of the Global South, for increased funding for global health care and the fight against tuberculosis and other diseases. Is this*



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*enough? What are the Global South's demands?*

Debt relief is a good start. In 2019, before COVID-19 hit, half of the world's lowest-income countries faced substantial debt problems. But this needs to be complemented by other actions. I think we must be clear on this point: the combined economic and health impacts of COVID-19 threaten to completely overwhelm countries in the Global South. Commodity prices have plummeted, exporters of manufactured goods have seen markets in the US, China, and Europe effectively shut down, and dollar-denominated debt has skyrocketed. The "Financial Times" reported that global investors have dumped tens of billions of dollars' worth of emerging market assets since the coronavirus outbreak began.

Millions in the Global South derive their livelihoods from the informal sector. These economic activities fall outside of official statistics, even while making up a substantial portion of economic life. India and Morocco have pledged support for this sector, but it remains to be seen how other states will respond.

The crisis will be different depending on where one finds oneself—it is imperative to point out that the "Global South" is made up of a diverse range of countries, with significant variance in terms of economic and state capacity and, indeed, politics and class divides. Brazil is not South Africa, let alone Malawi. Solidarity, therefore, should be based on a real assessment of specific conditions and not on an abstract view of the world's "poorer" nations and regions.

In South Africa, where I am from, close to 80 percent of the population faced imminent risk of falling below the poverty line before the outbreak. A significant portion of the country's population suffers from HIV and tuberculosis. Meanwhile, it has a critically under-capacitated public health sector and already strained fiscal resources, along with a collapsing currency. The future is frightening to contemplate.

*At present, substantial financial resources are being made available to lessen the social and economic consequences of the crisis. Do you expect a relapse into national capitalism—a process of international "desolidarization", so to speak? Or do you rather see the pendulum swinging in the*

*direction of a global order based on solidarity?*

This depends on what we do. People need to be shaken out of complacency and distraction. The global middle classes, including people from the Global South, will now turn to streaming, online shopping, and pass the time with whatever forms of entertainment are available. This is a response engendered by the system itself, a sigh of a people who have no sense of power or hope, and little faith in a vision for an alternative world.

But the mind-numbing solutions will not work for long as more and more people wake up to the gravity of the current situation. The threat of destitution is palpable even for those in the middle class—particularly in the Global South, where middle-class life is still largely precarious and debt-ridden. This is also increasingly the case in the Global North after years of austerity and neoliberal governance. Of course, for the vast majority of people in the Global South this is an urgent matter of life and death. Direct and urgent action is needed. Here, too, fear can give way to scapegoating, xenophobia, and racism. Before the outbreak, South Africa already struggled with xenophobic violence in poor and working-class communities. Ethnic and religious violence still plagues several countries.

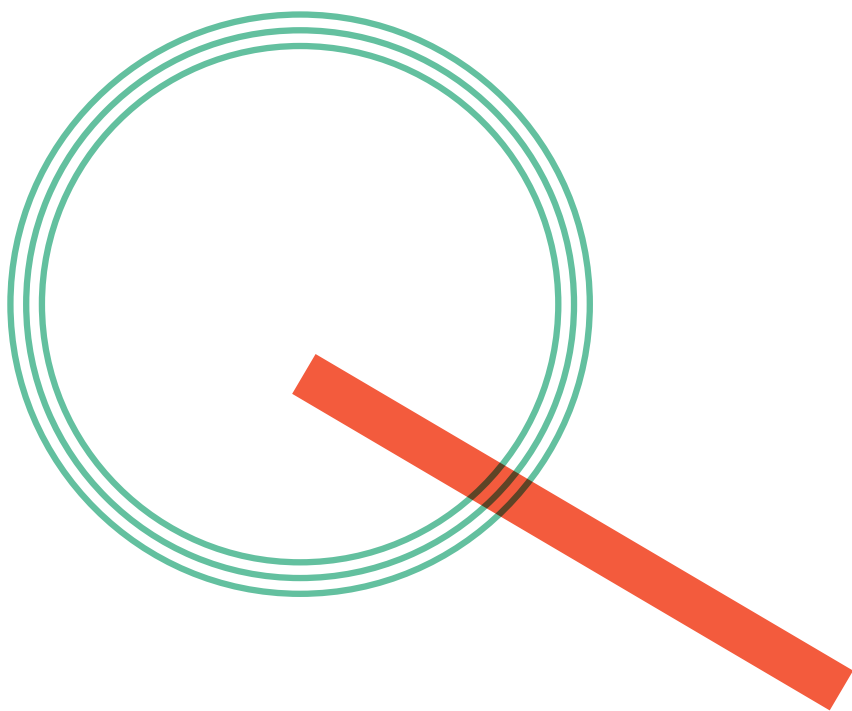
Ultimately, without a vehicle to channel rising levels of anxiety, the latter can facilitate the "desolidarization" you speak of—even support for authoritarianism. Here, the Left needs to step in, provide hope and vision, and offer up concrete pathways to political action. Across the Global South the progressive community is rallying. It needs support from comrades in the Global North and across the world. Now is the time for coordination and resource sharing.

Internationalism has both moral and material grounds in the present conjuncture. Progressive movements in the North can help articulate the international dimensions of the current struggle, while also emphasizing that a struggle must be waged for a humane and democratic future. At the risk of sounding cliché, Rosa Luxemburg's phrase, "socialism or barbarism", has never resonated as clearly as it does today.

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A long version of the interview has been published on [rosalux.de](http://rosalux.de)





# Sources of despair, sources of hope

The future of the labour movement in the face of coronavirus and pseudo-“wellness”  
By Mark Bergfeld

Work was negatively affecting both our physical and mental health long before the coronavirus came onto the scene. This is no surprise. What is surprising is how capital and employers have sought to address the current crisis in work, which now runs so deep that the World Health Organization has decided to include “burnout” in its list of illnesses. Yet rather than acknowledge the copious amounts of medical research evidencing the disastrous health effects of working long hours, capital continues to vigorously promote the idea that work fosters well-being and helps individuals flourish.

In Britain, this ideology has led to a meteoric rise of suicides among healthcare professionals in the last seven years, with more than 300 overworked nurses taking their own lives. Meanwhile, disabled persons and those on benefits are forced to undergo assessments whether they are “fit to work”. Unsurprisingly, Britain’s Health & Safety Executive reports that in the 2018–2019 fiscal year 12.8 million workdays were lost due to stress, anxiety, or depression, while concurrently the Office of National Statistics found that only 273,000 working days were lost due to labour disputes—the sixth-lowest annual total since records began in 1891.

Some more “progressive” employers have recommended moving towards shorter working hours. A possible reason why, as a recent article in the men’s magazine GQ underlines, is that a reduction in working hours increases productivity. In times of a global pandemic and world economic crisis, this proposal resonates with ever larger sections of capital. However, the current pressures on employers also mean that they need to squeeze workers harder to instil shareholder confidence.

One means to achieve this is to make the labour force more resilient to stress and improve its ability to engage in deep thinking. It is against this backdrop that the rise of “wellness” ideology can be understood. Large companies have also gone over to holding 60-second-long mindfulness sessions before meetings. Elsewhere, companies offer yoga and mindfulness courses, promoting wellness instead of health and safety with the aim of increasing employees’ resilience. During the Brexit negotiations, British civil servants were provided with mental health and stress support, as well as on-site wellbeing exercises. These developments are not limited to white-collar workers. The US restaurant industry—notorious for its harsh and extreme working conditions—is now



writing a new chapter by introducing on-site yoga and other wellness measures to reduce high labour turnover.

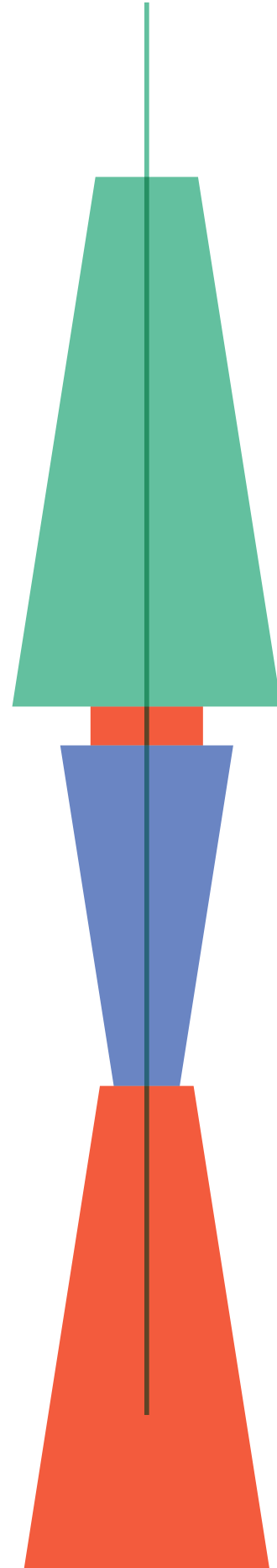
Mindfulness plays a central role in capital's attempts to turn us into perfect employees. In his book *McMindfulness*, Roland Purser argues that the practice of mindfulness has been stripped of its Buddhist essence and ethics of radical empathy, while Sanam Yar shows that mindfulness fails to tackle workers' working conditions or racism within the workplace. Instead, mindfulness epitomises self-optimization in an ever-harsher world. The trendy phenomenon privatizes stress and destroys public life. Mindfulness and wellness are thus central ideological tenets to understand the contemporary crisis of work and the way capital imagines the future of work. Employers use wellness, positive psychology, or mindfulness to make us work longer hours in a more efficient way.

Yet capital's offensive is being contested. According to Lena Solow, disagreements over an obligatory wellness programme were at the heart of the West Virginia teachers' strike in 2019, a wave of action that continued to spread through the entire country all the way to Los Angeles.

The LA teachers and their supporters evidenced how the strike established new forms of solidarity beyond wellness. As the 34,000 school teachers (with approximately 700,000 students) took on their superintendent—who also happens to be a Wall Street banker—they pioneered new forms of solidarity that countered the very Californian ideology of wellness. A “Tacos for Teachers” fundraiser raised more than 30,000 dollars to feed the striking teachers, showing how the strike fostered “wellness” on the picket line and beyond. Even the anti-union news channel CNN had to acknowledge the sweet taste of solidarity.

Public school teachers are not the only ones battling the wellness ideology and creating new forms of solidarity in its place. Last year, the very workers providing yoga and wellness services to companies and clients formed a trade union. As yoga has developed into a multi-million-dollar industry, it is no surprise that yoga teachers now want a piece of the pie.

The reasons for their organizing efforts are numerous. According to an article in the Buddhist magazine *Tricycle*, teachers at a company called YogaWorks have to spend more than 3,500 dollars on their training. Yet there are neither standardized hiring practices, remuneration scales, nor HR systems. According to the *New York Times*, yoga teachers work for two or three different employers as “self-employed” or “part-time” workers without access to health insurance, and earn roughly 175 dollars per day. Moreover, teachers are expected to prepare classes on their own time. Interestingly, they joined the Machinists' Union, showing how new groups of workers join old unions seeking to expand their power in the wellness economy. Consequently, the Machinists' Union will strike a collective agreement with YogaWorks covering more than 100 employees across four sites in New York City, and is now targeting other sites across





the US. As YogaWorks is not the only company facing criticisms for labour violations, it is quite likely that other groups of workers will organize across the wellness economy.

There is an apparent contradiction at the heart of the wellness economy: namely, its products and services are primarily marketed to women, who in turn continue to face discrimination on the labour market and are more likely to join trade unions. This is most apparent in the care sector. Despite the growing importance of wellness and well-being to reproduce capitalist social relations, it has not resulted in improved working conditions for health care workers. In Connecticut, for example, one third of home care aides are immigrants, with the vast majority being women of colour. They are expected to be on call 24 hours per day, 27 days per month, yet they only earn 10 dollars per hour.

With an ageing population, more complex care needs, and no sustainable financing model for home-care services, workers have taken up the baton to create decent work and decent business models in the form of cooperatives. SEIU 1199 union and workers' cooperatives have been working together to improve the working conditions of home care aides across New England. Unfortunately, the New York Times reporter portraying the workers on the frontlines seemed more interested in the meditation apps they downloaded than current organizing efforts.

Renewing the labour movement will require a broader ecology of organisations to emerge. Such organizations and organizing efforts are growing across the world. In Japan, women of the #Kuttoo movement—playing on the Japanese words kutsu (shoe) and kutuu (pain)—have been petitioning and campaigning for companies to disband the discriminatory practice of forcing women to wear high heels.

Forms of new resistance among the women workforce are leading to changes in what Karl Marx called the “organic composition of capital”, or what can simply be labelled “automation”. A study in Britain has revealed that the retail sector—one of the largest sectors for women’s employment—is automating frontline jobs and replacing women with self-checkout counters. Employment growth has shifted to e-commerce and logistics, in which especially women with poorer levels of education or those seeking part-time work face an uphill battle. In turn, the British retail industry is looking to move some of these jobs up the value chain by turning retail workers into “influencers” within their premises, reproducing old gender stereotypes.

The IT sector, where the wellness ideology was born, is rapidly becoming a hotbed of worker radicalism. The Google walkouts over sexual harassment were not only inspirational, but definitively ended the notion that collective action was not possible in Silicon Valley.

In another example of the new tech worker organizing wave, after the walkouts IT workers at the outsourcing company HCL, responsible for running Google Shopping, voted to join the United Steelwork-

ers’ Union. These trends show that younger groups of workers have not only developed a political consciousness, but are organizing new unions attacking the entire edifice of the brave new world of work Silicon Valley promised.

“Oh-so woke” Google is not making women workers’ lives any easier, as two of the organizers of the walk-outs are now facing “demotion”. Yet tech workers are not giving in. At Microsoft, workers have called on the giant company to cancel its nearly 480-million-dollar contract with the US Army, as it “crossed the line” into weapons development. In a letter to management, Microsoft engineers wrote: “We are alarmed that Microsoft is working to provide weapons technology to the US military, helping one country’s government ‘increase lethality’ using tools we built. We did not sign up to develop weapons, and we demand a say in how our work is used.”

The beginnings of a new form of political unionism are evident. More than one 1,00 Amazon employees have pledged to take action for climate justice. They demand that the company no longer fund climate-denying politicians, that Amazon Web Services cuts its ties to the fossil fuel industry, and that it cuts its emissions to zero by 2030. Whether the Google walk-outs over sexual harassment or this action by Amazon employees, it appears that the tech industry’s workforce is sitting at the source to solve the multiple crises the world faces—not through disruptive technologies, but collective action.

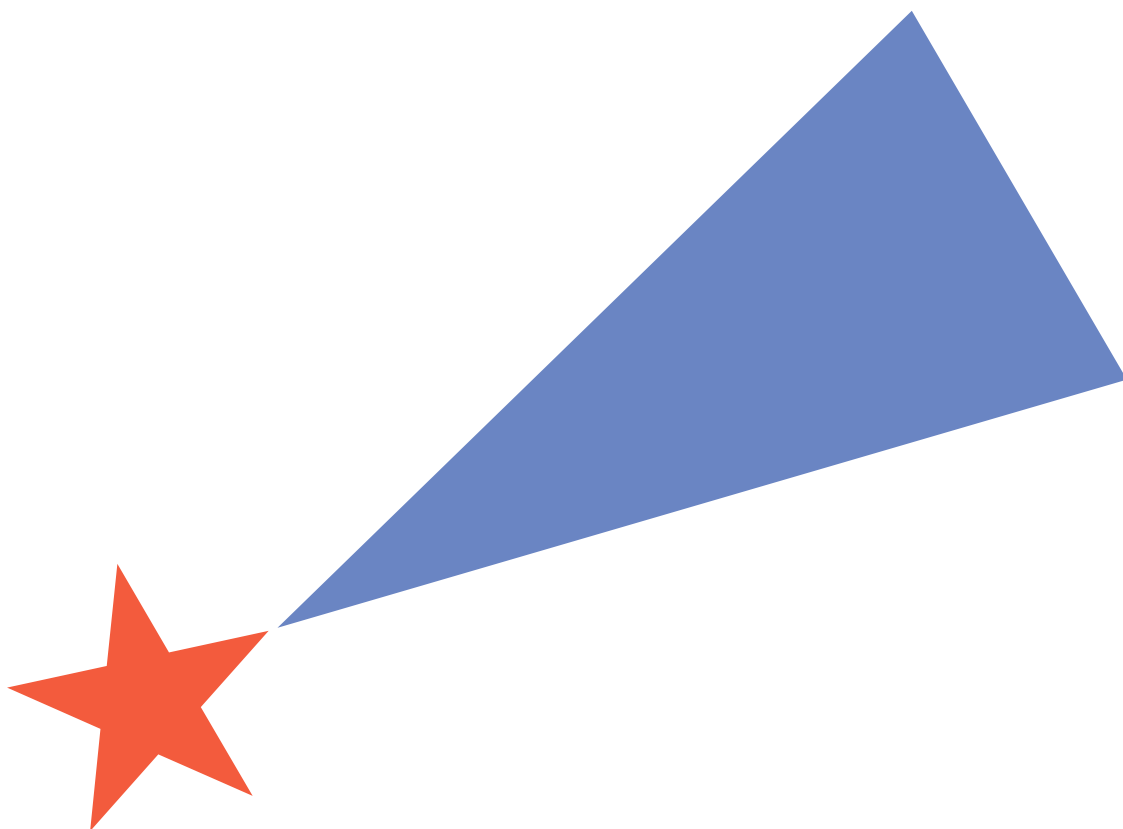
The coronavirus pandemic is now fundamentally reshuffling the deck for workers across industries, national borders, and even continents. On top of the many challenges already facing the nascent labour movement, workers now face months of deep employment insecurity, growing health risks at work, and a looming economic crisis triggered by the coronavirus outbreak.

The political response so far has been mixed and even incoherent: in countries like Spain and Denmark, comparatively worker-friendly governments have passed legislation to support workers and ensure that the coronavirus does not lead to mass unemployment—at least for the time being. In the US and UK, where current administrations are anything but pro-worker, the economic burden of the pandemic is likely to be shouldered by and large by the working class. The new labour movement is not yet powerful enough to define the terms of struggle or challenge these governments in a fundamental way. But times of crisis are always also times of opportunity, both for the rulers as well as the ruled. There is no better time for labour to go on the offensive and demand that the billions being dispensed as emergency aid to corporations be diverted to the workers—the people who built our economy and keep it running through the pandemic.

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## A world to win

Towards a global solidarity and internationalism for the future.

An editorial by Tom Strohschneider

This edition revolves around two major concepts that within a leftist cosmos constitute the firmament of thought and praxis: solidarity and internationalism.

Whenever a struggle for a better future takes place, it must be conducted in the spirit of solidarity and work to expand relationships of solidarity at all levels.

Wherever people are engaged in campaigns for social progress, universal rights or ecological economics, they highlight the global dimension of these challenges and the concomitant need for internationalist perspectives in both thought and action.

Whoever joins the worldwide phalanx of progressive political action is drawn into solidarity towards others, towards people whose struggles sometimes pursue other intermediary goals than our own.

Using the words of Bertolt Brecht we could say that solidarity and internationalism are reasonable—that is, everyone can grasp their meaning. And yet solidarity and internationalism forever remain “that simple thing, which is so hard to do.”

When we started planning for this special edition of *maldekstra*, we discussed at length the connotations of these concepts and their relationship to one

another. Could solidarity perhaps be understood as an individual attitude, an ethico-political compass for collective relationships, a connection that starts from the self but reaches beyond it? And would internationalism, then, rather be the sum of political practices that transcend the nation state as the frame of reference, in the realization that this is imperative for tackling global problems, given that one of the root causes of the challenges we face—the capitalist mode of production—has itself long been international?

It is not without reason that the Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung congress planned for May 2020 in Leipzig revolves around both terms: “global solidarity” and a “new internationalism”. This dual focus indicates that one can never exist without the other and that solidarity is not just an individual attitude, but something that is built collectively through praxis and transcends the self. To go beyond simply thinking about solidarity, and actually start practicing it, already forms part of a creative and productive process that, in times of globalized relationships, can very quickly come to constitute an internationalist praxis. Whoever wants “humanity” to ultimately be synony-



mous with “equality”, as Etienne Balibar put it, is acting according to self-interest, which at the same time is, or could become, a common interest.

From the individual to all of humankind and back: those who demand better working conditions, social relations, and ecological perspectives are acting in the interests of all those who care not just about the issues themselves but how they are addressed. Those who act within the framework of solidarity, and who also strive for relationships based on solidarity, do so for themselves and at the same time for everyone else. This is not due to some kind of “objective” common class interest. Rather, it is because the practice and experience of solidarity is a necessary part of the path towards an alternative future, away from a world in which self-centredness is part of the “neoliberal” DNA. The relations criticized in this process are those that separate people, placing them in constant competition with one another. In a world in which the capitalist rat race is purported to be a place of self-fulfilment, personal “achievement”, and leaving “the competition”—other people—behind, solidarity can overcome individual self-interest through a kind of collective self-love: together we become human.

Solidarity, Jürgen Habermas once said, is “a term that describes the mutually trusting relationship between two actors who have become part of a joint political project of their own free will. Solidarity is not charity, and it certainly isn’t a form of conditioning for the advantage of one of the actors.” One could add that, from a left-wing internationalist perspective, there is no “one actor” in the singular sense, because solidarity is about achieving universal emancipation for all people. Or to quote Karl Marx, who left us with this categorical imperative: the goal is “to overthrow all relations in which [the human] is a debased, enslaved, abandoned, despicable essence.”

Of course, this is easier said than done, especially since the conditions in which the doing must be done have changed, and will continue to change. Solidarity and internationalism are not fixed elements or ahistorical truths; nor can they be invoked merely as ideals—you also have to “do” them, and just how that is accomplished has something to do with the social conditions that shape our actions.

Solidarity and internationalism, therefore, also have their own history, or rather, diverse histories—a leftist kind of history with all its mistakes and distortions. And whenever the conditions under which left-wing, socialist, and left democratic forces aspire to achieve the goals of solidarity and internationalism change, then those goals—the very concepts themselves—must be reaffirmed, re-examined and, if necessary, re-calibrated.

With the slogan, “Global solidarity: for an internationalism of the future”, the forthcoming Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung congress in Leipzig seeks to intervene in a debate that has begun already and will continue beyond this meeting. Boris Kanzleiter, one of the key initiators of the congress, has described the framework in which our explorations will take place

in these terms: “Given the multiple crises of capitalism, the rise of new authoritarian regimes, increasing xenophobia, and the worsening global ecological crisis, international responses from the left are needed now more than ever. However, it is unclear how a new internationalism can be articulated politically and organizationally in the current political context. Different actors arrive at different answers and set different accents.”

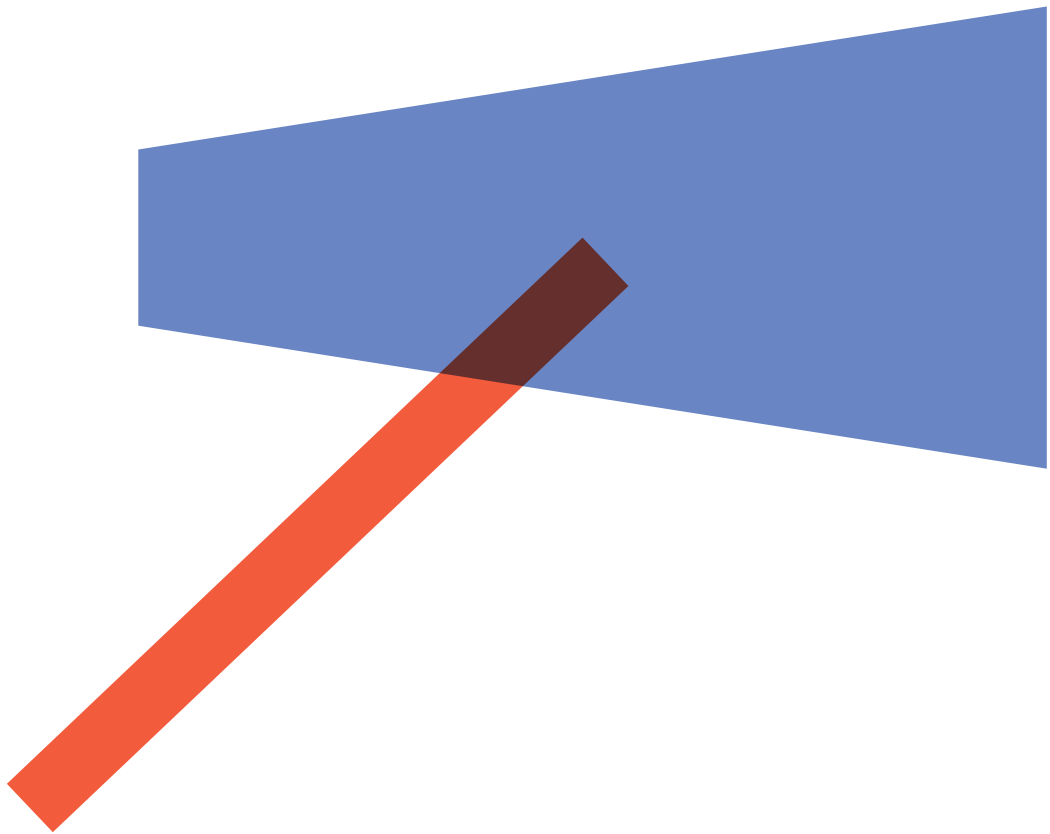
Kanzleiter continues: “The strategic challenge of formulating a new internationalism is to develop positions and strategies that promote the hegemony of the left worldwide. In order for this to happen, a new internationalism must be at least three-dimensional. First, it must help to reduce the blatant worldwide social inequality between the Global North and South and improve life opportunities for the majority of people. Second, it must help reduce social inequality in individual societies—both in the Global South and in the Global North. Third, it must reduce the extent to which the ecological costs of global capitalist production and consumption are externalized to the Global South and promote processes of socio-ecological transformation.”

Furthermore, solidarity itself will need to be spelled out anew. The “old” idea of solidarity grew out of the dynamics of a factory system that has in the meantime been surpassed in the history of capitalism. According to Lutz Brangsch, a “new” idea of solidarity will “grow from the transformation of this system and its associated new socio-economic distinctions”. It can build upon the many new forms of self-organization, upon a well-established alliance between the middle and bottom layers of society, and upon the ever closer ties between actors in the Global North and Global South. “New” solidarity is non-paternalistic and open to the autonomy of struggles for political progress elsewhere, and yet it maintains its core values.

The “new” thing about solidarity today is that, as a political and ethical compass, as a moral and cultural bond, it is “a priori only possible on a global scale, since hegemonic power is actually global.” This makes things more complicated, but also points to the crucial role of solidarity and internationalism as driving forces in the transformation of society.

“It’s about organizing a collective process of transition,” writes Alex Demirović, “in which the rich centres, wherever they may be, are no longer allowed to stay rich. Instead, they must either forego or share resources, submit to a collectively deliberated appropriation of nature and division of labour, and work cooperatively towards a process of transformation that allows human existence to find a sustainable reconciliation with the natural world.” That is a big task. It is a task in which, in our universe, solidarity and internationalism represent the firmament of thought and praxis. It is a task in which we have “a world to win”: for all.





## Multiplicity of an extensive network

Solidarity is more than just a means, an instrument, a utopia. Solidarity has been and remains a tangible experience By Bini Adamczak

‘The opposite of all this s\*\*t? Standing with you’: this was the title Missy Magazine gave an article written by author and theatre producer Simone Dede Ayivi—and that can justifiably be described as an ode to left-wing solidarity. Solidarity not as an aspiration, an ideal or manifesto, but as something felt and practised; something that truly exists. The kind of solidarity people feel when they occupy Hambach Forest, get involved in an anti-fascist youth club, stop an eviction, battle through the everyday sexism they experience at work, take part in sea rescue operations or participate in Facebook groups.

Ayivi’s ode is praise that is far too seldom heard—praise for the tender but militant activism people engage in during their limited lifespan, even though they could just as well not. She is not blind to the burdens of acts of solidarity that can both inspire and cost energy. At times, solidarity demands making difficult decisions rapidly. For example, a police stop and search operation in front of a supermarket, a situation which Ayivi precisely and dramatically reconstructs in the piece:

‘Two police officers stop and search an individual. They intimidate the person, are rough and arrogant, and wave the person’s papers in her face. When

the person attempts to take the papers back, one of the policemen yells, “Hey! Try that back at home in Afghanistan, if you want, but not here in Germany!” In such moments I feel a sense of conflict between my head and my heart, and in the end it is not really clear who has won: My heart instinctively instructs my body to react immediately. Help—by any means!—or at least show that I am there and witnessing the situation. Should I film what is happening? Yell something? But what? My head, in turn, highlights the dangers of acting. The potentially negative consequences of reacting—before I step in, I need to at least have a basic strategy [...] It takes about four seconds for the words to form in my mouth, but I can’t remember anymore what it was going to be. Because, before I could speak, the following happened. The person behind me: “What did you say?” The person with a pram next to me: “You’re being racist!” The person on a bicycle: “That’s something you can maybe say at home [...], but not here!”

For solidarity, this is possibly a key scene. The crucial moment is precisely when the internal dialogue between head and heart is broken. It is no coincidence that the question ‘what should I do?’ evokes the age-old dilemma posed by German history teachers: ‘What



would you have done?’ The question that reduces even National Socialism to an individual quandary of courage and martyrdom: evil and me. Such a concept annihilates all forms of collective resistance. Responsibility rests with the individual.

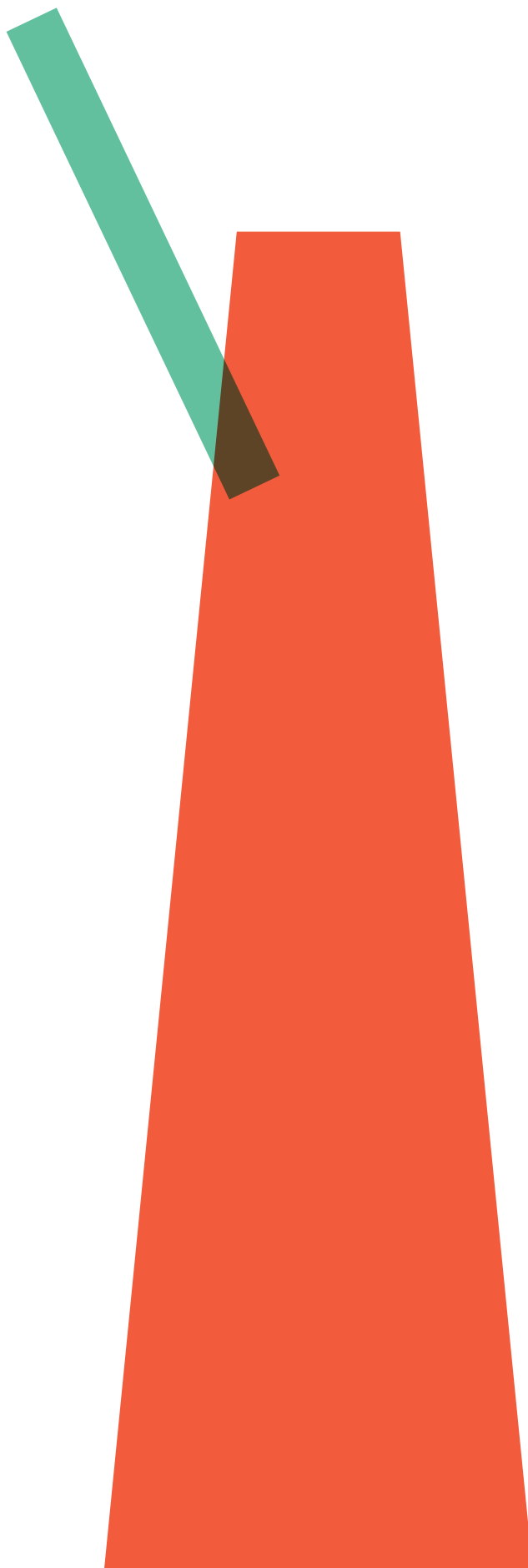
Neoliberalism’s separation of people from each other is broken when the bystanders react to the police’s stop and search. It is important to mention that this scene took place in Kreuzberg, a place characterised by a decades-old tradition of successful political, and anti-racist, struggles. In a small town in Saxony or Bavaria, a similar reaction by bystanders would have been less probable and, actually therefore, all the more wonderful.

As the philosopher Arndt Pollmann once put it, ‘Showing solidarity implies saying “You are not alone” and meaning it’. In Simone Dede Ayivi’s case, we could add: ‘You are not alone—and not even alone with me’. Solidarity is never a piece of one’s identity; it is not something that you own. It is also not a code of conduct that you can follow as an individual; it does not involve being a hero. Rather, solidarity is something that occurs in relationships; something that happens between us. The environment of solidarity, as this episode teaches us, is not the spheres of ‘me and you’, home to most of our theories on ethics and morality, but a place of three, four or even many individuals within a context of many others.

Solidarity has become a very popular word—found in the names of conferences and heard in chants at demonstrations—because it creates relationships that bridge separation. Solidarity aims for equality but does not presuppose it. This explains solidarity’s attractiveness as a response to neoliberalism’s fragmentation of society, political cleavages and social isolation.

In Berlin’s Neukölln neighbourhood, the solA group (solidarity in action Neukölln) aims to overcome neoliberal divisions by providing support in the neighbourhood for struggles against bosses, landlords and the job centre. Where tenancy law, pay slips and integration contracts isolate people from each other, solA tries to build connections. The NGO counters paralysing feelings of shame and guilt to return stress to those who cause it. However, to establish solidarity-based relationships capable of replacing individualising hierarchies, organising support is not enough. When political activists stand on one side and affected people on the other, and the latter receive short-term or permanent help, solidarity risks turning into social work.

solA employs a raft of countermeasures to mitigate the risk of simply becoming a slightly more emancipatory but voluntary provider of social services. First of all, solA does not represent the interests of third parties if none of those affected is present. Furthermore, the declared intent is also to maintain the flexibility of roles within the group. At the very least, this last point presents a challenge in practice. Those facing a serious emergency may quickly feel overwhelmed if they are asked to not only passively accept aid, but actively contribute on an equal footing.





The question, therefore, is whether those who have received support then leave the solidarity network when they no longer need help or continue to contribute. This question is of central concern for solidarity policy and is also pertinent for anti-racist and internationalist work: can those who have received support also provide it?

Relationships of solidarity are not limited to a mechanical recognition of shared interests. It is possible to create solidarity across divided or even opposed interests. In Bremen and Hamburg, disabled individuals who require assistance have created associations to emancipate themselves from the arbitrary decisions taken by administrative bodies and key service providers. These associations employ assistants who, depending on the available budget and hourly wage, provide assistance for a determined length of time.

Solving the tension between hourly rate and length of time spent working is not easy. We can expect the negotiations between the association of assistance seekers and the works council of service providers to be on a more equal footing than the usual labour-employer relationships in public and private care systems. However, the divided interest of increasing the available budget reveals the conditions under which care is provided in both cases. A solidarity-based approach in the face of contradicting interests cannot easily solve the existing tensions, and rather leads to the question of whether overall economic conditions would have to change to ensure relationships of solidarity at this smaller level. This is the question of an anti-capitalist care revolution.

Solidarity is not just a means that we use because together we are stronger. It is not an instrument that we use to assert our individual interests and that we can then forget as soon as we have achieved our objec-

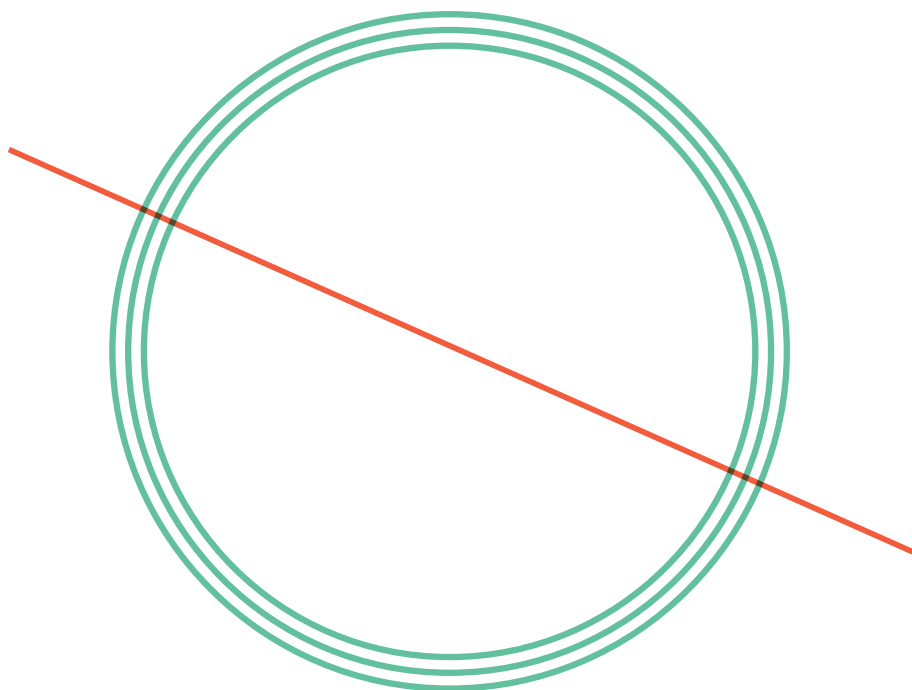
tives. But solidarity is also not some far-off utopia. It is not simply an objective that we can loudly proclaim or include in a policy platform and then forget about. In this regard, a solidarity-based form of relating does not necessarily have to negate the unequal starting position of the people it connects, but it also cannot accept such inequality as given and permanent.

When Subcomandante Marcos donated USD 600 he had received for an interview to the striking workers of Turin, he created a narrative that spread rapidly. This narrative highlights the complexity of global power relationships, where a Mexican intellectual can have greater access to resources than Italian Fiat workers. It is also a narrative of solidarity in which actors leave their designated places. Those receiving aid arrogate to themselves the right to help.

Something similar happened during the Arab Spring when demonstrators in Egypt held up posters expressing their solidarity with striking workers in Wisconsin, whose struggles were inspired by the uprisings in North Africa and South Europe. These gestures of empowerment remind us that solidarity is not a charitable relationship. It does not go down well with the hierarchical unilateralism of paternalism. Solidarity is something people have experienced in the past and present. It is also a desire to uproot all social conditions that stand in the way of a solidarity-based way of life for everybody.

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**Bini Adamczak** works mainly as an author and artist. Her most recently published books are “Der schönste Tag im Leben des Alexander Berkman” and “Beziehungswiese Revolution”. This text was first published in the newsletter of the aid organisation medico international. For more information, see: [medico.de/en](http://medico.de/en)  
Translation by Tim Jack and Nivene Rafaat for *lingua•trans•fair*







## Solidarity with those farthest away in our now small world

Aspects of a new internationalism—sharing experiences, jointly defining goals and taking action together By Alex Demirović

Internationalism is a long-standing tradition. However, its concrete form and function have changed several times over the past 200 years. Its various manifestations, which aim to act as a catalyst for solidarity and emancipation, have repeatedly proven to be shackles limiting action. This calls us to critically review and update internationalism's goals and concepts, and our internationalist practices, permanently. Yet we need not necessarily discard earlier practices. Many need simply undergo a critical analysis, others can serve as an example—but a need for new practices can also develop. Many difficulties thereby hinge not on the goodwill of internationalist actors, but are more basic in nature and result from changes to the capitalist mode of production and of the political environment.

Internationalism is a constitutive element of bourgeois society and within it, a form of struggle with the bourgeois state. The declaration of human rights dur-

ing the French Revolution as a precursor to a national constitution, nonetheless evoked the perspective of the whole of humanity. United in cosmopolitanism, everyone was to be able to enjoy freedom, equality and solidarity. This was a very tangible experience, as many French revolutionaries saw themselves closely tied to the American Revolution and similar processes on the European continent, the British Isles and the colonies. An economic and political form beyond the feudal small state system was emerging. Had it been for the revolutionaries of the day, the nation would not have been a nation state, but would have united the Third Estate, i.e. all those who produced society's wealth. The coming of a global state seemed possible. However, the (dis)order of restorative forces of Britain, Prussia, Russia and Austria, and eventually also France, forced the drawing of imperial frontiers that split not only Europe but the whole globe. Struggles for control and spheres of influence, and not human-



ity united, became the defining trait, creating the material basis for emancipatory and internationalist movements that exists to this day.

Consciously, the International Workingmen's Association reacted to the observed 'disregard of that bond of brotherhood', and how since the end of the 18th century, the divided attempts to create regional and national workers' movements in the struggle for emancipation had again and again led to defeat. The ruling classes proved capable of subduing liberation struggles, stoking nationalist prejudices and perpetuating slavery. It was these very actions that the International wanted to confront by uniting the working classes. Emancipation could not be local or national; it was considered a social task. Truth, justice and morality as the fundamentals of human behaviour 'without regard to color, creed, or nationality' was the basic rule. Socialist and communist movements, together with their affiliated groups, reasoned that they had no fatherland. They were not tied to any particular state and followed no national aims. Dispersed workers' associations within individual states were to group into national associations as the sheer number of members coming together would ensure the power, assertiveness and co-ordination with the International. Moreover, a critique and practice of change was to primarily be focused on the national level and tackle the dominant groups in each individual nation. This seemed logical, because otherwise the oppositional forces could easily become instrumentalised to serve the interests and political goals of the nationally dominant groups. The reality, however, was more complex than the declaration of the International had made it seem. The categories of nation, skin colour, religion—and, as the following decades would show, gender or sexual orientation—proved hard to root out; they were stubborn contradictions that often intersected with (and counteracted) social emancipation.

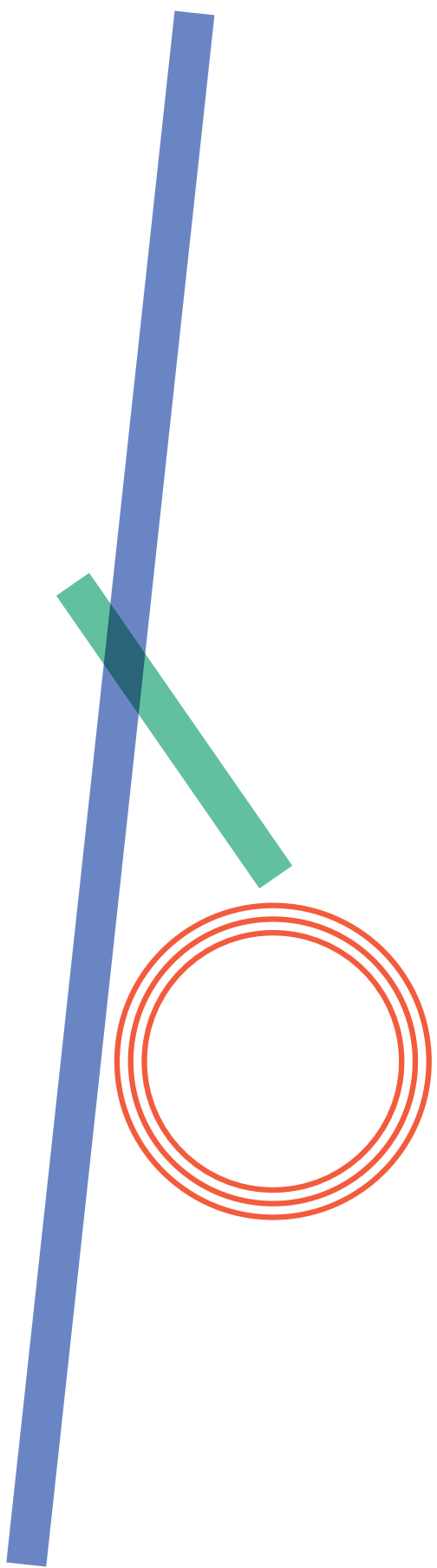
The key areas of focus for an internationalism, at least the manifestation that played a decisive role in the 20th century, almost certainly came about as a result of the Russian Revolution. Here, a socialist revolution had triumphed over the restorative forces of the aristocracy and bourgeoisie, as well as against the Axis powers of Germany and Austria, and the western allies. The Russian Revolution was seen to be ushering in a World Revolution; international solidarity therefore was a joint policy in a struggle for shared goals. However, and only a few years later, internationalism was to become limited to solidarity with the Soviet Union in the form of material aid or the defence, through propaganda, of the concept of socialism in one country. Solidarity became a trap that led to tragic conflicts: left-wing parties subordinated themselves to the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) and its goals. People on the left, even when they did have criticisms, felt obliged to positively identify with and defend the model, while the bourgeois camp demanded that any criticism be based on breaking with socialist goals. Any critique of the CPSU's policies, Stalin, or any fundamental criticism of con-

cepts within Marxism or socialism were denounced as deviation, treason, apostasy, counter-revolutionary or even as fascist. Criticising the party or the Soviet Union, and leaving or becoming excluded from the party could result in people seeing their entire social fabric fall apart. In the USSR, the consequences could be imprisonment or death, a subject the left hardly dared to mention and that proved controversial and toxic when it came to solidarity with the left in other global regions. It also led to deep rifts between communists and social democrats, as well as a great number of further left-wing movements. Many, whose internationalist convictions drew them to fight on the side of the Republic against Franco in Spain, saw themselves opposed by Stalinist forces and in the fascist-ruled states, Stalinist organisations denounced left partisans. Solidarity could become a murderous trap.

The Russian Revolution provided the impetus for national liberation movements. Their demand for colonised peoples' right to self-determination, was, in many cases linked to socialist objectives. Following the Second World War, internationalism was largely limited to the provision of support from the imperialist core countries to such movements. This implied creating awareness for the goals of these movements, spreading information on the exploitative and racist social conditions that the peoples of the colonies were subjected to and providing the movements and/or their representatives with material aid. Often, these liberation struggles took the form of proxy wars between the Soviet Union and the capitalist core countries, who feared independence could lead to a spread of communism and therefore intervened either directly through military action or by supporting anti-communist policies. India, China, Cuba, Algeria, Vietnam, Angola, Mozambique, Eritrea—amply supported by diverse protest movements in the imperialist core countries, the struggle for liberation had more or less reached its conclusion by the mid-1970s.

For the internationalist movement, however, new tasks arose. In 1973 the US backed a military coup in Chile led by Augusto Pinochet, who ousted the democratically elected government of the socialist Salvador Allende. Only few realised that the events unfolding in Chile heralded a new cycle of neoliberal economic policy that would soon dominate the global order for decades to come. There was also broad international support for the overthrow of the Shah of Iran as well as the military dictatorships in Greece, Spain and Portugal, while in 1976 the military staged a successful coup in Argentina. Meanwhile, Brazil was governed by a military dictatorship from 1964 to 1985. The struggles of national liberation movements in Nicaragua and El Salvador against native comprador bourgeois oligarchies, who took action against their own people and national capital factions in the interests of foreign governments and corporations—and were highly corrupt, anti-democratic and repressive—received broad support from internationalist campaigns and solidarity movements, in particular





during the 1980s. Many from these movements then fought as volunteers in these countries. These developments were asynchronous, as much in terms of the sequence of social struggles as well as in their socio-structural dynamics.

Internationalism was characterised by specific experiences and contradictions, some of which I would now like to highlight. (1) First of all, it is important to see the asymmetry of the relationship, because it is strange that people from a rich capitalist nation go to other countries with the aim of civilising, aiding, developing, supporting and interfering in the lives of other people. However, as the dominant powers did exactly this, it is obvious that the forces critical of the status quo also act to support the people who suffer exploitation by the core countries. This can easily lead to internationalist efforts appearing patronising. (2) These efforts were based on relationships of solidarity that were defined by the nation state form. Emancipatory actors can only rarely be jointly active on the long term and act as a single combined force; rather, they are blocked and connected by the imperialist and nation state apparatuses: on the one side, there are rich imperialist nation states, on the other, the movements that struggle to create an independent nation or to take power from the colonial masters and their local representatives in the existing state. States such as the Soviet Union or Yugoslavia—following their own specific agendas—could provide military or economic aid, create dependency and force loyalty. In western nations, the left—mostly without any ruling power—were only really able to support these liberation movements and their members politically and culturally, and far less materially. Given this constellation, practices of solidarity were contradictory. In some cases they were paternalistic, a fulfilment of duties: left-wing organisations and unions would send delegations to countries and conferences to show their faces; folkloric events or discussions were organised, a bit of money collected. Solidarity can be based on false, romanticising misconceptions of the population receiving support or on a desire for ‘revolution tourism’. Critical solidarity is neither wanted by those receiving this support, nor by parts of the solidarity movement, who do not want to hear criticisms of how minorities or dissident groups are treated, of human rights abuses, extractivism or misguided economic policy strategies, because they fear that this could weaken solidarity or hurt vested interests. (3) The willingness to provide support and be active follows a specific attention pattern, leading to important short-term mobilisations in the capitalist core countries that can contribute to the success of liberation movements. Corporations, the government apparatus, the secret services, the dominant public discourse are now blocked from continuing their open support of locally ruling elites and denying or denouncing efforts towards liberation and emancipation. Such solidarity, however, often quickly dries up or shifts to other regions and/or conflicts. For internationalist solidarity, it is diffi-



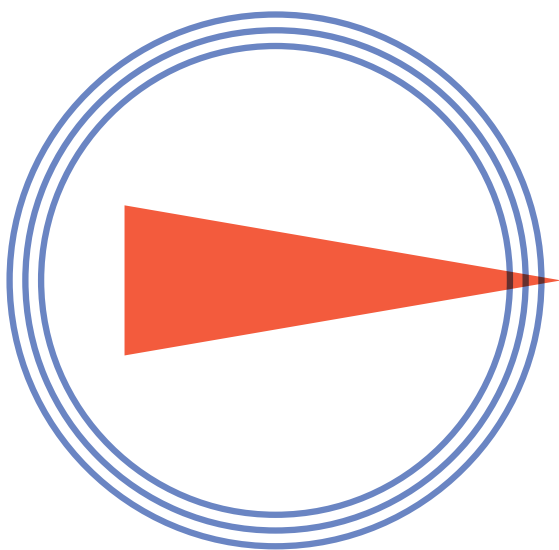
cult to establish and maintain continuous solidarity. (4) It is astonishing to see that those who do become active are interested mainly in the rise and struggle of a liberation movement, but not in what happens after the movement takes power. Apparently, there is a great readiness to support the objective of national self-determination. However, it is important to question the degree to which the aim of emancipation continues to be sought and is achieved. In Angola, with the takeover by the People's Movement for the Liberation of Angola (MPLA), a kleptocratic family seized power; Eritrea descended into a military dictatorship; South Africa saw corrupt elites grow out of the African National Congress (ANC); and in Nicaragua, the Sandinistas split in the face of its own government's corruption and authoritarian practices to cling on to power. In Cuba, critical voices are muzzled or persecuted. China and Vietnam have successfully integrated into the capitalist division of labour. While these last two nations both claim to be communist, the mainstream media highlight their dictatorial traits only during the rare occurrence of a crisis, and the left only cautiously discusses the authoritarian characteristics of these regimes. A democratic constitution or human rights, i.e. freedom of movement, opinion and science, or the freedom of minorities, should thereby not be the only issues discussed. An important question would be the emancipation of workers from the fate of salaried employment. The persecution of many Vietnamese in the aftermath of the successful liberation struggle, and the policies of the Khmer Rouge in Cambodia, were a shock which caused many in the European left to break with socialism and/or communism. These developments did not result in solidarity movements looking more closely at whom they were supporting, which kind of social development a particular group stood for, which forces were active in society and, in particular, which policies a successful group followed and how to potentially continue exerting influence on this group. The principle of solidarity can turn into ignorance, silence or the distancing, disinterest and dissolution of solidarity. (5) Internationalism is very clearly focused on the self-determination of the state. The internal differences within a society, i.e. the protection of specific sub-groups within the population with their own cultural traditions, religion and language, were not an important element for internationalist solidarity: take, for example, the case of indigenous peoples in the Americas; of Tibetans or the Uighurs; people living in large refugee camps that have existed for decades; the violence experienced by women or sexual minorities; the struggles of local workers; and the fight against large-scale construction and development projects. Although much has undoubtedly changed for the better since the 1970s and 1980s.

Decolonisation after the early 1920s, and then again after the 1940s, created a historically unprecedented situation for the former imperial states. Capitalist society has gradually expanded its rule since 1500 and reproduced on an ever-greater scale by appropri-



ating colonies, raw materials, food and slave labour. This also characterised the structures of power at its core. They were vast empires: expendable members of the population could be sent to the colonies and enormous wealth siphoned off, a part of which was then transferred to segments of the working classes. Now they had to transform into nation states that had to deal with numerous other nascent nation states, each having obtained formal independence and holding national sovereignty rights. The imperialist core shrank; these countries had to develop a new international division of labour, deal with the contradictions internally and would themselves become destinations for migrants. Relationships of dominance and exploitation, if they were not to implode, had to be reorganised following the 1970s and 1980s. The new states were driven into debt bondage, and their economic structure integrated into the international division of labour so that they could serve as providers of resources and cheap labour. Agribusiness, extractivism, a lack of control over patents and isolated industries therefore characterised these dependent nations. Profits were siphoned off by corrupt local elites and often used to finance the consumption of luxury goods and arms. When state socialism broke down and China began opening up in the 1970s, a solution to the crisis came into view: new markets developed. In particular, capital could be exported to produce close to the market, continue to use already written-off machinery, cut production costs (in particular by sidestepping social, legal and/or environmental standards) and use cheap labour. Neoliberal globalisation, spearheaded by the USA—the only remaining superpower—asserted that the global market was an inherent necessity. Globalised companies created globally interwoven chains of production and consumption. The nation states followed a policy of privatisation and deregulation. This considerably weakened the unions, also leading to consequences for internationalism. For left-wing parties, this development resulted in crisis because the political con-





cepts they had relied on during the Fordist phase were no longer effective.

Globalisation rests on a new international division of labour. Value chains are becoming separated and spread flexibly across all global regions, which remain divided into nation states. This also impacts concepts of internationalism, because the focus can no longer be a hierarchical and asymmetric relationship of internationalist solidarity between the Global North and the Global South, the core and the periphery, the rich and poor nations. Across all global regions, rich centres with extremely wealthy people, and poor peripheries with high rates of unemployment and poverty are developing. There are strong asynchronous social and spatial developments, but at the same time a kind of shared global perspective is growing; an understanding of problems that considers humanity as a whole and that necessitates joint action is developing. Objectives, actors, issues and internationalist practices are changing. This is visible in approaches developed following the UN conferences (Conference on the Human Environment, World Conference on Women, Climate Change Conferences) and civil society activities by politicians and entrepreneurs in semi-private organisations such as the Trilateral Commission or the World Economic Forum. The development is related to a new concept of government as non-formal governance that occurs in the shadow of the state. It is linked to a process of establishment and public support for nongovernmental organisations. These are active in nearly all spheres: union rights, the environment, climate and biodiversity, workers and consumers and the potential harm they face from products or production processes, human rights, arms, migration, medical care, water and food, agriculture, urban development and countryside destruction, corruption, megaprojects, and gender and sexuality. Even though NGOs are often financed by the North and tied to the state, their work still has repercussions for the capitalist core, countries that now must accept that standards,

criticisms and change are also retroactively applicable to the centre.

In 1994 the Zapatista uprising in Chiapas provided a wake-up call for social movements against globalisation and the orthodoxy of the Washington Consensus. With the election of Hugo Chavez (1999), Evo Morales (2005) and Rafael Correa (2007), attempts to establish a form of socialism adapted to the 21st century soon began and could, to a certain degree, count on the support provided by the election of Lula da Silva in Brazil (2002 and 2006), the Kirchners in Argentina (after 2003) and Mujica (2009) in Uruguay. These projects explicitly positioned themselves against the centuries-old colonial oppression and exploitation of their countries. The Zapatistas organised in a new form of community-based democracy, Venezuela experimented with councils, Bolivia adopted a new, plurinational constitution that took into account and strengthened the rights of indigenous communities, and, like the other governments, Correa pursued a policy directed against international institutions and corporations, and against US-dominated free trade policies, defended a Bolivarian shift in Latin America and fought against poverty. Even though these efforts were soon met with fierce resistance, Bolivia and Ecuador aimed to stop extractivism and conceived long-term policies to ensure that resources were used for internal development and the *buen vivir* of local populations. To a certain degree, these countries were themselves internationalist. The World Social Forum movement (the first event was held in Porto Alegre in 2001) was created and also provided the basis for South-South solidarity, providing activists with networking opportunities and a platform to organise joint action.

In the Global North, broad resistance and protests emerged against government decisions to follow a policy of neoliberal globalisation (against the WTO meeting in Seattle in 1999; the G8 meeting in Genoa in 2001; the EU summit in Gothenburg in 2001; and the G8 meeting in Heiligendamm in 2007). All of these protests united social movement organisations like Attac and left-wing, church and development organisations that strive for a different world order.

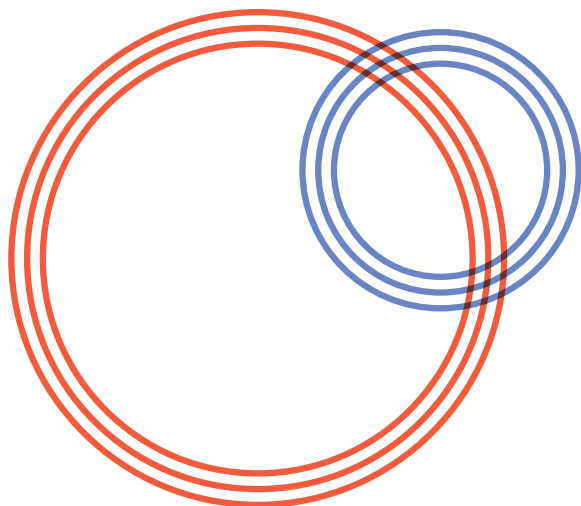
The developments that followed the 2007/2008 global economic crisis gave rise to social movements and provided an environment in which they could thrive in rapid successive waves since 2011, taking root in numerous countries and mobilising diverse sectors of society (Tahir Square, Puerta del Sol, Occupy Wall Street, Blockupy). And again, internationalism here is no longer an asymmetric relationship, but rather a (not always easy) process of sharing experiences, strategies and objectives and the planning of joint actions. For internationalist activists in the countries of the Global North, this to a high degree involves reflecting on their own circumstances and taking over a new form of responsibility. In the face of accelerated climate change, extinction of species and the destruction of livelihoods, in particular in regions of the Global South, the objective must be to reorganise lifestyles in the capitalist core



towards sustainability, self-sufficiency, and peaceful modes of production and consumption. Only such a transformation would allow the societies of the periphery, or the Global South, to become emancipated from multiple imperial relations of dependency. This also creates a new shared responsibility because the result of this transformation cannot be the isolation and autarky of the capitalist core. Such a development would plunge many regions of the world into even more dire straits. What is required are free and self-determined forms of cooperation, the transfer of knowledge and joint co-ordinated production. The rich countries must therefore support poorer societies to transform their societies and to produce globally equal living conditions. This needs to happen with the necessary awareness to avoid violence and paternalism. The capitalist core must begin by eliminating the diktat of perpetual accumulation—attempts which are met with fierce resistance as a result of populist authoritarian policies that try to drive forward fossilism, military build-up, valorisation of raw materials and labour—and simultaneously contribute towards an endogenous development of the societies of the Global South. Jointly they must find out which relationships will make a shared life possible. Internationalism in this regard means solidarity with those who are the farthest away and who have now become very close—not only as refugees but because we directly share with them our work, food, air and water. We must jointly organise a process of transition in which the rich countries of the core, wherever they are, relinquish their wealth by refusing to exploit or sharing resources, by accepting a jointly decided appropriation of nature and division of labour and participating in concepts for transformation that lead to a reconciliation of humanity with nature. This would require, as Jacques Derrida stated two decades ago, an entirely new International.

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Translation by Tim Jack and Nivene Rafaat for *lingua•trans•fair*



## The International Workingmen's Association

'This Association is established,' the provisional rules of the organisation of 1864 read, 'to afford a central medium of communication and co-operation between workingmen's societies existing in different countries and aiming at the same end; viz., the protection, advancement, and complete emancipation of the working classes.'

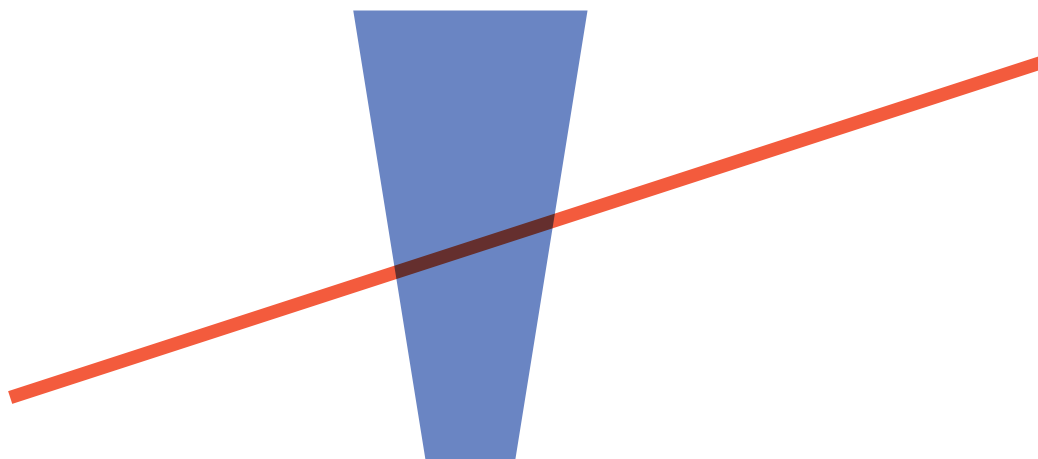
The author was Karl Marx; the organisation the First International. The old man from Trier had, as he would write one year later, been 'participating with great keenness in the International Association formed last September by the leaders of the London trade unions'. It had therefore been founded on the initiative of the British unions. Yet the IWA was designed with workers all around the world in mind—an umbrella organisation for the 'immediate combination of the still disconnected movements'.

From a theoretical perspective, the association was grounded on Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels' analysis in the Communist Manifesto that they had developed nearly twenty years prior: as 'the need of a constantly expanding market for its products chases the bourgeoisie over the entire surface of the globe', production and consumption in all countries would become international. On the resulting global market, there would then no longer be any political space for the old, local and national 'seclusion and self-sufficiency'. Their argument was that where capitalism leads to generalised exchange and the dependency of nations on each other, workers, too, needed to organise internationally. Already, Marx and Engels had been convinced that while political revolutions would still take place at the nation state level, they would have to be connected internationally.

Politically, the makeup of the new association was relatively diverse, stretching from communists to socialists, reformist unions and anarchists, which means there were also opinions diverging from Marx, who saw this diversity as progress 'compared to the fantastic and infighting sect organisations' that had existed up until that point. Engels would later note that 'only thanks to this breadth the International then became what it was'.

In practice, the First International was only capable of exerting pressure to a limited degree; it did, however, fulfil a role as a hub and point of reference. ■





## “We’re right back where the international Workingmen’s Association started”

Boris Kanzleiter on global authoritarianism, left-wing countermovements, and a new internationalism

*maldekstra: Possibly one of the most important slogans for the whole left-wing internationalist movement comes from the 1848 Communist Manifesto. Here, I’m referring to the famous rallying cry at the end of the book: “Workers of the world, unite!” Let’s take a look at this from today’s perspective: just how united are we now?*

**Boris Kanzleiter:** I’m afraid that we haven’t made much progress when it comes to uniting the workers of the world. There are manifold structural cleavages that are being further exacerbated by the competition between locations to attract businesses and investment prevailing on the capitalist global market and by nationalist discourses. I think this whole concept of “being in competition with one another” is more pronounced today than at any other moment in history.

*Instead, a right-wing authoritarian “International” is on the rise. Is this another facet of left internationalism’s flaws?*

Right now global authoritarianism is rife, driven by right-wing political forces. These organizations all pursue different projects depending on the specific context in their respective countries. Yet, together, they have still managed to shift the global balance of power to their advantage and are gradually gaining

more and more hegemony. This is a dangerous development.

*But, at the same time, it is also a contradiction: The right promotes nationalistic demands, thus narrowing horizons and fostering inward-looking politics, it erects barriers in the way people think and act, excludes people, operates in a way that undermines international practices and conventions, etc. Yet, despite all this, the right is gaining increasing clout on the international stage and emerging as a global threat.*

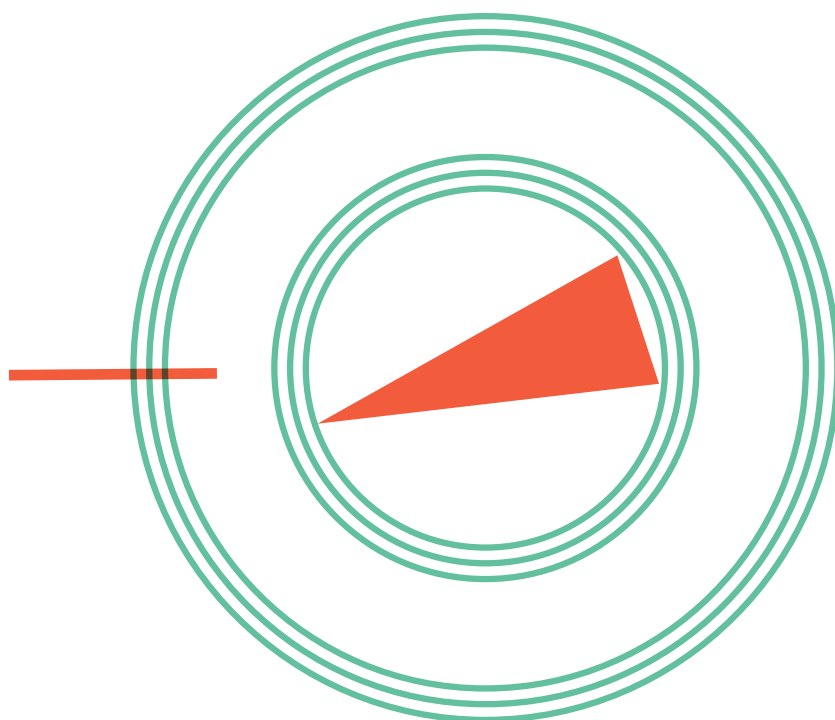
We must not overlook the fact that the authoritarian right pursues its nationalistic goals with the help of ideological props that can be used in any context and are intertwined with one another. The frequently aggressive antifeminism, for instance, an ideology that people like Donald Trump use to launch a targeted attack on the achievements of the women’s movement. And the very same approach is taken by right-wing political actors in Brazil or within the AfD here in Germany. In the process they refer to and draw on one another’s activities. A similar phenomenon can be observed in the field of climate change. Here, different right-wing forces from around the world reinforce one another by calling into question the scientificity of the findings of international climate



Foto: privat

**Boris Kanzleiter** is the director of the Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung’s Centre for International Dialogue and Cooperation. Tom Strohschneider spoke with him. Translation by Carla Welch.





research. In the interests of certain capital factions, they then use this to launch their attack on the demands of a climate policy that is driven by socio-ecological imperatives. And this, in turn, is combined with nationalist discourses.

*The success of left internationalism was always dependent on organizational networking. Is the authoritarian right now moving in the same direction?*

There have been attempts, for instance by former Trump adviser Stephen Bannon in his tour around Europe, to forge a right-wing front. On the international political stage there is also evidence of right-wing governments attempting to collaborate, at least when the focus is on opposing forces they have identified as “the enemy”. And here there is a new development: due to the growing number of right-wing governments, the right now has more weight in international institutions. We only have to look at how certain central European countries, led by Hungary and Poland, operate within the EU: although they pursue a nationalistic agenda, they do this collectively.

*The Left, in contrast, appears weak at this level.*

This is a major problem with several facets. For example, the fact that we are

currently observing a renationalization of policies, even among left-wing forces—a paradoxical development at a time when we are increasingly facing global challenges. It’s hardly surprising then that the Left’s capacity for action on the international stage remains limited. Or the fact that organizational cooperation isn’t particularly effective, something that’s illustrated by the fate of the Party of the European Left (EL), for instance. The EL got off to a promising start in 2004, but has not yet managed to develop a common narrative or very much political clout since then.

*Do they perhaps lack a platform? Virtually all left-wing political actors call for internationalism.*

The issue isn’t whether internationalism is being discussed here, it’s which internationalism. And therein lies another problem: when it comes to internationalism, all too often left-wing political actors remain stuck in past discourses. And statehood still took centre stage in all these “old” perspectives: for a long time, internationalism meant referring to real socialist states. Much of what was negotiated under “internationalism” was part of the rivalry between political and economic systems. Even the movements that experienced international solidarity



were generally based on the concept of statehood, with the objective of coming to power in a particular country. Here, between the October Revolution and 1989, their policy was guided by a specific reference point—the Soviet Union. Particularly in the Tricont countries, there were powerful freedom movements looking to Moscow and to a certain extent also to Beijing in their search for an ally. Circumstances changed dramatically for left-wing movements the world over in 1989, however.

*Do we need a “new internationalism”?*

This is certainly a long-running debate and one which has been conducted on many levels: by intellectuals in the global South, such as the recently deceased Samir Amin, in the context of Bernie Sanders in the US, and not least by all of us at the Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung. There are no ready-made blueprints to show us what form a new internationalism might take. But it is still a necessary debate, part of which is to come to a consensus about the “old internationalism”, about its successes but, of equal importance, also about its contradictions and failures. Today, socialist statehood no longer occupies centre stage.

*So what does?*

Today we are essentially back where the IWA started in 1864: we have regressed to the creation of alliances, and networks of individual left-wing actors and movements and associations all have to re-established. Now it’s no longer about “helping your brothers and sisters”, but instead about a new transnational politics from below.

*But the Left still has the tendency to follow the rise of emerging markets with a certain longing as these countries represent another “good” point of reference. Or, they tend to support governments primarily because the US is against them.*

It’s true that this tendency does exist, for instance with respect to Nicaragua, and also, to a certain extent, when it comes to the assessment of the Russian government. However, the tendency is diminishing. If we look at the example of Venezuela, today even those who just a few years ago had uncritically supported the Chavez government no longer place the blame for the crisis solely at the door of others. The truth is that there are strong economic and political interests that would like to steer Venezuela in

another direction. At the same time, there are a lot of domestic factors responsible for the crisis of the Chavez government, ranging from the economic development model to the severe lack of democracy. In fact, many of Venezuela’s local activists see things this way too. The firm rejection of the perpetual US intervention against Venezuela does not mean that we should take an uncritical view of Maduro.

*So the new internationalism also includes a new desire for critical reflection?*

Of course. We will not simply be able to leave the history of internationalist debates and practices behind us. This history belongs to us, with all its good and indeed less favourable elements. We will only do it justice if we learn from it.

*To what extent is internationalism about feelings, about projection?*

Internationalism has a great deal to do with feelings. Part of the basis for internationalism and solidarity is empathy. It’s about the ability to see oneself reflected in others. It’s about seeing the suffering and the struggle of others as something we want to show solidarity with. This is not just a rational approach. It has more to do with what Marx calls the “categorical imperative”, what he describes as “overthrowing all relations in which the individual is a degraded, enslaved, abandoned, despised being”. There is another aspect of identification that is related to our own personal weakness and the need to compensate for this by projecting all expectations onto other movements in other places around the world. This is something we can understand but it has also always led to problems. A third point is the class-political aspect which is the basis of the practice of internationalism. Common interests are a rational component of common struggles. This is why we advocate for specific global social rights, such as those which, to some degree, already exist in the form of the ILO’s core labour standards.

*Through empathy, human beings are placed at the heart of an internationalist self-image. So who, according to the class-political view, should we place centre stage today? It will certainly no longer be the “workers of the world” referred to in the Communist Manifesto.*

Here we need to distinguish between various different levels. Although there



are considerable variations within the production process in terms of social milieus and positions, it would still be legitimate to continue referring to an abstract interest of the world proletariat—in the capitalist context this encompasses all those who are forced to sell their labour or are constrained in other types of economic relations of dependency. Something that also has to be brought into the discussion here is a specific universal right: the right to be a human being, in other words, to be able to access the opportunities that the current level of social development offers. Right now, the vast majority are still excluded from such possibilities. At the same time, we also know that the members of this global proletariat are constantly being played off against one another. And, on top of that, a plethora of objectively different interests is thrown into the mix, emanating, among other things, from the different stages of development of the world's economies. These circumstances make it very difficult to develop common political projects.

*And this is where the empathy factor comes into play again.*

Exactly. These two elements have to be combined: empathy and the class-political dimension. And here we should really go into more detail about the movements and collaborations where this combination already functions effectively.

*Please, go ahead!*

In the last few years, feminist struggles have become globally networked. And movements advocating for climate justice aren't in any way restricted to national arenas either. Here, too, new networks have emerged. We have seen school students from around the world organizing strikes against governments' ignorance when it comes to climate policy. The transition from an old to a new form of internationalism is a longer process. One phase was the emergence of an anti-globalization movement in the 1990s. International anti-summit protests are also part of the same process, as are global social forums. Although the severe economic crisis that began in 2007 triggered a shift towards renationalization, there were also new attempts at international cooperation and new momentum. This started with Occupy Wall Street followed by the Europe-wide endeavours to oppose the prevailing austerity course which continue to this

day. There is also international cooperation in the manufacturing and trade sectors. Let's take, for example, the Amazon strikes staged in various countries or the ongoing efforts of trade unions to advocate for the introduction of minimum standards across national borders.

*But particularly when it comes to the trade unions, you get the impression that they don't always take internationalism very far.*

The regulation of labour is still essentially negotiated at the nation-state level. Accordingly, trade unions also concentrate on this level. International umbrella organizations do exist, but real power is not in the hands of these organizations. The Left, however, should use the available opportunities to push the trade union movement to focus more strongly on transnational solidarity. In the sense of organizing along global supply chains, for instance. Along these lines, successful transnational strikes were held at Ryanair against the company's corporate policy of playing staff off against one another.

*We are operating in a "space of the political" that is constantly lagging behind the "space of capital". Economic globalization is real but at the international level there are very few political levers to push through social interests, or those that exist are relatively weak.*

But this should not be an argument against changing global conditions and the balance of power. The left have no alternative if they want to live in a different world.

*The creation of a different world presupposes that we can triumph over what has been dubbed the "externalization society" or "imperial way of life" where progress in the Global North is made at the expense of the rest of the world.*

This is why socio-ecological transformation is so key. And, as far as the "imperial way of life" is concerned: is it really prosperity that has been created in the Global North by exploiting the environment and resources of other world regions? It is imperative that we address this question. It's about alternative social models that measure quality of life based on factors other than the consumption that is controlled by transnational corporations. It's about securing a good life for everyone. Everywhere.



# Practical critique of the imperial mode of living

Elements for a new internationalism to consider By Ulrich Brand

Capitalist globalisation, with its inherent economic, political, social and environmental upheavals, is, first and foremost, a strategy undertaken by imperial states and capital. Yet the process is also influenced by the normal everyday lives of many people in the Global North. To terminologically condense some of the key issues that an updated internationalism and global solidarity require—as forms of opposition to the impositions of capitalist globalisation –, Markus Wissen and I have proposed the concept of the imperial mode of living.

The imperial mode of living is based on access to cheap raw materials and labour power, often at the expense of the suffering, exploitation and humiliation of people and environmental destruction elsewhere, by companies, employees in the production process, the public sector and/or regular citizens as a result of their consumer lifestyles. Elsewhere also includes access to such resources that occurs within the societies of the Global North. For some this leads to empowerment and material wealth, but also—if politically desired and fought for—a functioning public infrastructure and public services. For others, the process translates into a progressive destruction of their livelihoods and to relationships of dependency becoming further entrenched.

The contradictory nature of the imperial mode of production and living is also owed to the fact that many both benefit (for example by accessing cheaper products) and pay the costs (by being forced to sell their labour power in an environment characterised by competition). On the other hand, the imperial mode of living creates constraints by forcing people to work and live by it, making alternatives difficult. Or when consumption that is directed at demonstrating one's status drives people to buy products they do not really want. Yet, mostly—and this is a second contradiction—these constraints are not felt as such.

The imperial mode of living is closely tied to the history of colonialism and the nascent phases of capitalism, and in spite of locally specific characteristics, it went on to practically become the universal mode of living under capitalism in the post-war societies of the Global North. Over the course of the last 30 years, globalisation has deepened this process by reinforcing the access to labour power and resources in other places, as well as with the advent of resource-intensive digitalisation. We have created a system whereby people are increasingly reliant upon resources and high-tech products, as well as T-shirts, cars and food items, that are produced by underpaid workers, particularly in the Global South. Subjectively, many experience this as wealth. However, the divisions neoliberalism creates in the Global North, the expan-

sion of the low-wage sector and increasing resource usage, also tighten the imperial mode of living's grip.

## Awareness versus income

The imperial mode of living does not mean that all people in the Global North live in the same way. Rather, studies confirm that people's ecological footprint depends mainly on income and not so much on awareness. High earners have greater access to products and services that are produced under socially and environmentally questionable conditions. As mentioned above, the imperial mode of living in Germany is status-oriented and not only destroys the environment, but is also based on and magnifies social inequality. Their high income means the middle classes can afford a car and high levels of consumption, and thereby consciously set themselves apart from the lower classes. As a consequence, people with little money are de facto (and feel all the more) excluded.

Evidently, the imperial mode of production and living is meanwhile reaching its global ecological limits. There have always been regions that under certain circumstances experienced ecological collapse. But ecological collapse now looms globally. One could also say the imperial mode of living is a victim of its own success. And in times of crisis, it produces a politically explosive third contradiction: as the world market continues to churn out relatively cheap food for the metropolises, this mode of living has a stabilising effect, in particular in the Global North. The process thereby magnifies political, social, economic and ecological crises elsewhere and thus fuels the causes of conflict and flight.

However, the imperial mode of living is also based on the fact that its conditions and negative consequences remain invisible or are ignored.

Some years ago, in an article in the Austrian daily *Der Standard*, writer Ilija Trojanov referred to a study that had been commissioned by 20 governments and was carried out by Germany's Registration Agency for Social and Economic Data. The study's conclusion was clear: if global average temperatures continued to rise at current rates, over one hundred million people would die by 2030 from the direct consequences: drought, drinking water shortages, crop failure, poverty and disease. '100 million people is not a trifling sum,' Ilija Trojanov asserted. 'That is more than the combined number of victims of both world wars. If you missed this piece of news, don't feel bad. It was withheld from you. It's not that we've got used to staring the apocalypse in the eye or that Hollywood blockbusters and other elements of pop culture have made destruction feel omnipresent; the truth is buried in a short sentence of the report that could be eas-



## The tricontinental and armed struggle

In January 1966, delegates of 83 organisations from Africa, Asia and Latin America met for the first Tricontinental Conference in Havana, Cuba. It was the founding of the Latin American Organization of Solidarity (OLAS) and the Organization of Solidarity with the People of Asia, Africa and Latin America (OSPAAAL). In 1967, the latter published Che Guevara's world famous letter with his call to create 'two, three or many Vietnams'.

There are few who embody the internationalist and activist movement that led to the Cuban Revolution as well as the iconic doctor and guerrilla leader. Six months later he would be murdered in Bolivia. But it was not least his Message to the Tricontinental, which he had sent to an OSPAAAL solidarity conference, that attracted worldwide attention. Translated into German by Rudi Dutschke and Gaston Salvatore, the text encapsulated the hope many held at the time for a continental revolution in Latin America within the global anti-imperialist struggle. It was also an expression of the foco theory, according to which weak revolutionary forces could provoke a process of upheaval through military action.

In their introduction to Che Guevara's Message, Dutschke and Salvatore had speculated on possible 'contributions of revolutionaries from the metropolises', demanding the development of 'specific forms of struggle'. Soon the question of the legitimacy of violence was on the table, an issue that was controversially discussed at the 1968 Vietnam conference. Dutschke's assassination a few weeks later further fuelled the debate on 'the shift from protest to political resistance'. This was then built on by a number of actors, including those members of the left who would go on to form the Red Army Faction (RAF).

From here it was a short step to interpreting the attack on the Israeli Olympic team in Munich in 1972 as an 'internationalist act'. Shortly after followed the attacks of the German Autumn of Terror (1977), the controversial debates on terrorism and fundamental rights, as well as the RAF's 1982 declaration 'The Guerrilla, the Resistance and the Anti-Imperialist Front'—which at the time German newspaper taz said 'eloquently attempted to hide the total lack of perspective' of 'a few politicised intellectuals, who believed they were being particularly revolutionary simply because they had a machine gun hidden in their closet'. ■

ily overlooked: 'Over 90 per cent of these deaths will occur in developing countries'. So everything is fine; they are going to be affected, not us.'

The term imperial mode of living also helps shed light on many of the policies proposed in Europe and the USA by the conservative and extremist right wing. In times of social division and heightened social anxiety, these political groups are offering proposals on migration, trade and foreign policy that first and foremost promise to protect the interests of those in the capitalist core countries, the aim being to perpetuate the role of other global regions as suppliers of cheap products. In the meantime, the doors are being closed to those seeking help. Thereby, the concept of the imperial mode of living also reveals that this mode of living is dynamically also becoming the norm for populations in the Global South, for example in emerging nations such as China and Brazil. It makes the expansion of capitalism attractive to ever more people. A system of inequality that operates both within nations and globally—with divisions along the lines of social class, gender and race, but precisely also based on generalised modes of production and consumption patterns—has proven decisive for the reproduction of the imperial mode of living.

## Highlighting alternatives

I occasionally visit Ecuador. While there, I witnessed that when the oil price shoots up, salaries and state revenue increase, and immediately so do the number of cars and, in particular, SUVs. In Ecuador, too, the imperial mode of living instantly shows its effects.

Globalising capitalism, however, also locks many in catastrophic living conditions. From a geopolitical perspective, economic globalisation and the global spread of the imperial mode of living amplify the Global South's need for raw materials. Competition for land, for example in Africa, is growing. The process intensifies a fourth contradiction of the imperial mode of living, which I have termed eco-imperial tensions. In the food industry, for example, to grow palm oil, sugar cane or soybeans for global corporations and consumption in the Global North, globalisation leads to people being displaced from the land on which they could previously grow their own food. Humiliated and deprived of their rights, they now become plantation workers on land that used to belong to them. Forced to sell their labour for under USD 2 per day, these are individuals that, according to World Bank statistics, will be considered to have been lifted out of poverty. We need to confront the apologists of globalisation with the bitter realities facing ever more people when they wave statistics around, claiming that global levels of material poverty have decreased.

Any analysis of these dynamics should motivate us to seek and reinforce the contradictions in, and the resistances and alternatives to, the imperial mode of living. Numerous interesting discussions during workshops and promotional events for our book showed both me and my co-author Markus Wissen that the concept of the imperial mode of liv-



ing relates to the unease felt by many. Young people meet at writing workshops on the imperial mode of living to work together with others to broaden their understanding of the world and to change it. There is a generalised sense of unease with authoritarian political tendencies, increasing social polarisation and enrichment of the elites. Developing a form of global solidarity that keeps pace with current trends

hinges on conceptualising globalising capitalism as a multi-layered relationship of dominance and tackling it accordingly. At the moment, achieving this appears difficult, because the dominant discourse of globalisation consists of championing competition and increasing the competitiveness of particular locations. In the end, the promise of 'if all of us here in this particular place stand together, our lives will eventually become better' is not so far away from 'America First!'.

What alternatives are there to the imperial mode of production and living? Multiple forms of resistance exist. So too do proposals to defend social rights in ways that challenge those in power and the relations of dominance they represent, instead of gaining ground at the expense of others. The Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung and its global partners are part of this practical search for alternatives. What we require most desperately, however, is a fundamental transformation of the dominant model of development based on the path taken by the Global North. During Germany's 2015 summer of migration, many people showed their willingness to leave their comfort zone. Developing a food system based on organic agriculture will require new dietary patterns as well as a non-industrial system of global production.

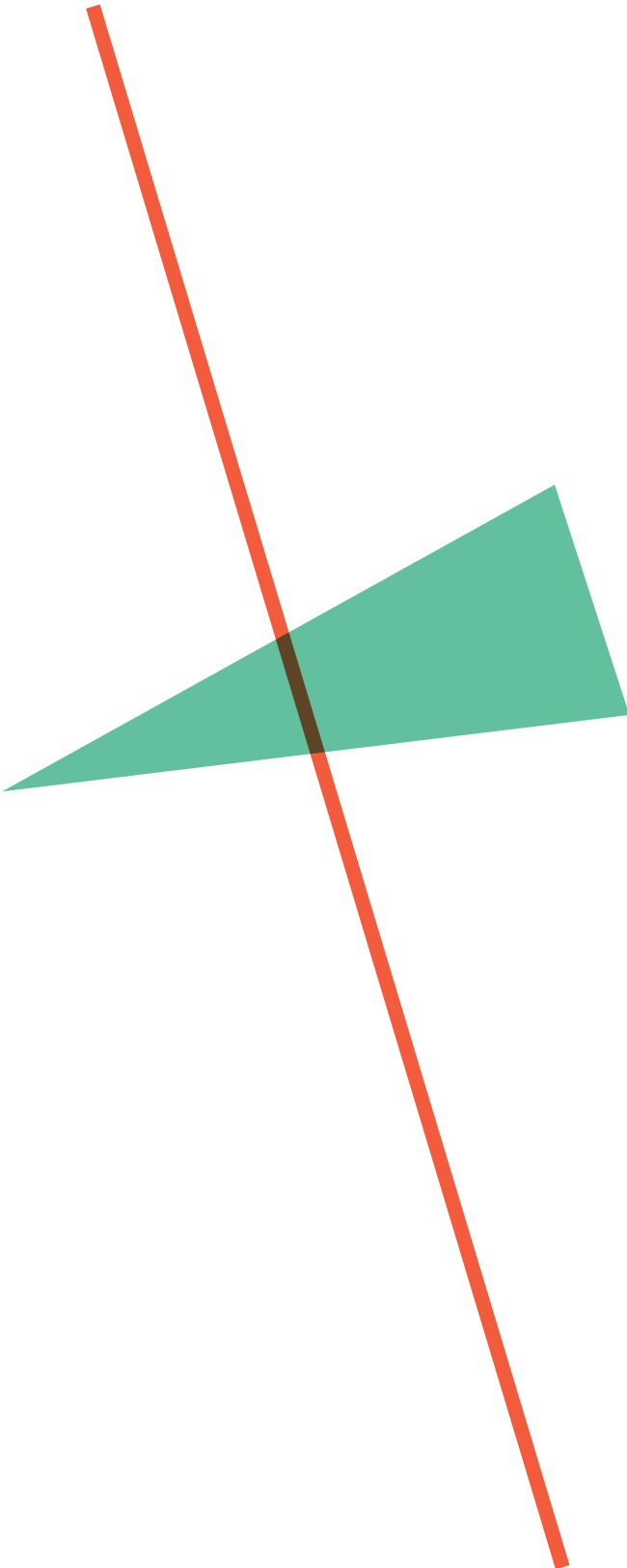
We need to be clear: such a development will not come about without conflict and struggles. An important recent experience in this regard is the Ende Gelände campaign to phase out lignite mining and lignite-based electricity generation in Germany. These efforts must go hand in hand with ending German coal imports from Colombia and any other place where coal production is socially and environmentally destructive. I could go on, but I shall conclude by saying that global solidarity cannot be solidarity with the Global South. Instead, it must also include a critique of the imperial mode of living embraced by the upper and middle classes in the countries of the Global South. This mode of living stabilises relationships of dominance and produces consensus, albeit to the detriment of the poorer segments of society and the natural world.

This critique should distance itself from the overbearing attitudes of the middle classes and organisations from the Global North and their 'hip alternative green lifestyle'—its aim should be one of emancipation, and absolutely nothing should stand in its way.

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Translation by Tim Jack and Nivene Rafaat for lingua•trans•fair





# We still have a chance

Left-wing YouTuber Sabrina Fernandes wants to change not only Brazil, but the whole world By David Pfeiffers

How to fight a pandemic, how to talk about its effects, about alternatives, about criticism, when the president of your country calls it a “small flu”?

Although Brazil was the first country in Latin America to register a COVID-19 infection, the right-wing authoritarian head of state Jair Bolsonaro ignored all evidence, bypassed his health minister’s warnings, and insisted on a “normality” that doesn’t exist. Is it all just a “gripezinha”? Not at all, says Sabrina Fernandes. In a segment called “Bad politicians, Bolsonaro and the pandemic”, released on her YouTube channel in late March, the left-wing sociologist and activist focused primarily on the social and economic consequences for the majority of Brazilians.

Fernandes points out that for millions of people, staying at home due to the coronavirus means not getting paid and not being able to buy food. She spoke about the homeless who do not have a home to protect themselves from the virus. She criticized Brazil’s healthcare system, under which millions of people do not have access to modern medical care. In many places, such as the poor districts and the favelas, even running water is lacking. Fernandes points out that the vast majority of Brazilians are not millionaires, and need access to a functioning public healthcare system. Even market-liberal economists are advocating for significant improvements to this system, underscoring their indignation at its current shortcomings.

Fernandes’ videos get tens of thousands, sometimes hundreds of thousands of views. Born in 1988 in Goiânia in central Brazil, she began learning English at the age of 13, and has taught the language herself since the age of 16. A scholarship later allowed her to study economics at St. Thomas University in Fredericton, Canada, where she graduated with honours. After that, she obtained a master’s degree in political economy from Carleton University in Ottawa and a doctorate in sociology. She received distinctions for her dissertation on the crisis of the Brazilian left.

But Fernandes moved back to Brazil, partly for political reasons. In 2017 she launched her YouTube channel, where at first she spoke about her research. In the meantime, by her late twenties she had become an expert in Marxist theory, critical pedagogy, feminist studies, and environmental sociology. The channel became increasingly political as its popularity grew. 2017 was the year the PT Labour Party accused Bolsonaro’s predecessor Lula da Silva of money laundering and passive corruption. Lula vehemently denied all accusations, and many critics of the allegations against him described it as a political campaign to prevent him from running in the 2018 presidential elections.

Fernandes released her first online video with the title “On the Left”; half a year later she renamed the channel “Tese Onze” in reference to Karl Marx’s eleventh thesis on Feuerbach: “Philosophers have hitherto only interpreted the world in various ways; the point is to change it.” This was meant not only politically in the sense that Fernandes advocated for a reorganization of the Brazilian left and criticized former presidents Lula da Silva and Dilma Rousseff’s failures in terms of class politics, i.e., demanded change.

It was also about her use of YouTube’s communication format itself. As a left-wing woman, Fernandes is still an exception among political YouTubers. Her goal was to use communication tactics “that don’t simply stick to the well-trodden, yet boring formats of the left” to address those large sections of the population that critical voices have hitherto too rarely reached. Fernandes gives short courses on Marxism, feminism, ecology, comments on Brazilian and international politics, and breaks down right-wing propaganda. So it’s about a connection between knowledge and politics rather than a classical educational model. On her channel Fernandes says, one can “prepare to change the world”.

Fernandes was politically active early on, even in Canada. She was initially involved in the student movement and feminist collectives, and was also a member of the New Democratic Party, the far-left party in the local House of Commons. Back in Brazil, she focused on issues such as the country’s negligence of environmental issues, and violence against farm workers and indigenous people. In the 2018 presidential elections, Fernandes initially supported the activist and writer Guilherme Castro Boulos, who had run for the Partido Socialismo e Liberdade. In the decisive second round of voting, she campaigned for Bolsonaro’s opponent Fernando Haddad. But Bolsonaro won the vote, and for Fernandes it was a bad election.

But what does “bad” mean: the victory of the ultra-right is “worse than Trump’s election victory”, according to one of her videos for “Tese Onze”; the US president is virtually a moderate compared to Bolsonaro. Bolsonaro is an apologist for torture, he hates human rights, and is a friend of the military dictatorship that ordered the killing of leftists. “Bolsonaro is a danger to democracy,” says Fernandes.

Educating people about this on her video channel is one thing. The other is: what effect does it have? For all the self-criticism that the Brazilian left will need to go through in order to once again become a powerful opposition, it is first necessary that there can be an opposition at all. But Bolsonaro talks in terms of “wiping out” the opposition, not only the socialist one. For the critics of the ultra-right, international solidarity is therefore essential for survival.



International solidarity is generally an important topic for Fernandes. We must “come together internationally to face global challenges”, everyone must understand that the respective ecological, social, and economic situations in different countries “do not exist in isolation”, but rather side by side: “Climate change is here, capitalism makes inequality grow, intensifies exploitation. But there are many people today who are committed to fighting it from a principled perspective. Actually, they have been doing so for a long time. It’s important for us to encourage solidarity and link these struggles if we want to have a chance.”

Of course Fernandes knows that these challenges are just as complex as joint political action across national borders is difficult. For this reason it is not possible to face them without solidarity and an internationalist practice. “We must create spaces where the exploited and the oppressed can meet and develop methods of resistance as well as new proposals,” says Fernandes. This starts with questions of environmental protection, and goes much further than better coordination of worker’s struggles. It is a matter of “listening to those most affected, taking them seriously”. And it’s about countering the international networks of the powerful and the interests of capital with something collective from below: “We’re talking about linking struggles and coordinating actions, from global campaigns to cooperation between organizations, and as much exchange as possible.”

Meanwhile, in Brazil, thousands have repeatedly taken part in day-long protests against Bolsonaro’s coronavirus policy. Shouts of “Bolsonaro must go” and “murderer” ring out from open windows, along with the noise of the beating of pots and pans, by now almost traditional. The journalist and scientist André Trigueiro called for impeachment proceedings. And Twitter, the short-messaging platform, even removed some of Bolsonaro’s posts because the way he downplayed the pandemic was considered to be life-threatening.

Even Bolsonaro now speaks of “the greatest challenge facing our generation”. But this evidently only came about under pressure from the military, his closest and last remaining political allies. At the beginning of April, two thirds of Brazilians denied that the head of state was competent to manage crises. But that is only one of the many problems Brazil has under this president. Sabrina Fernandes will continue to have many reasons to raise her left-wing voice.

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Translation by Hunter Bolin and Sam Langer for  
Gegensatz Translation Collective

## The non-aligned movement

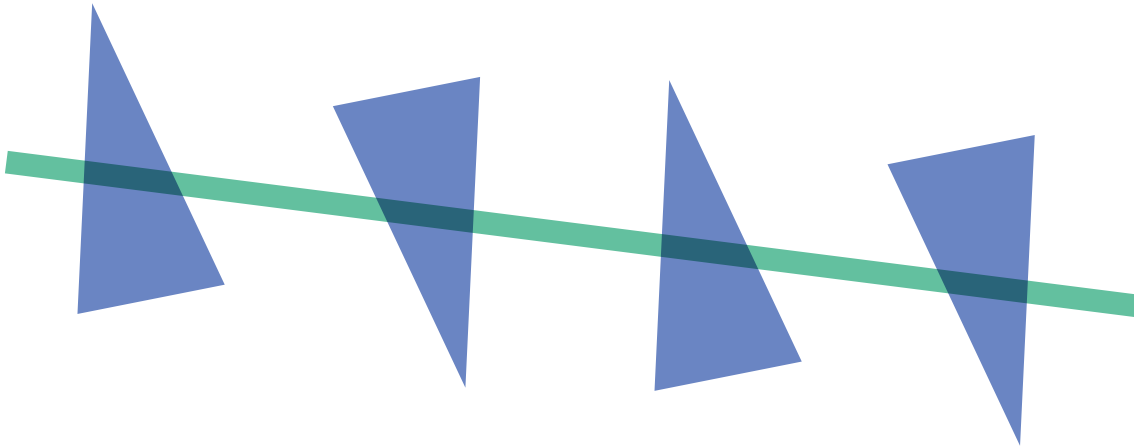
After the Second World War, international cooperation in many cases was a choice between the two dominant power blocs in Moscow and Washington. What options were available to nations and their governments that did not want to belong to either category? Which options did nations and their governments have that did not want to make this choice?

At the initiative of Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru and the Yugoslavian President Josip Broz Tito, representatives from 23 Asian nations, among them China, and six African nations met in Bandung, Indonesia, in 1955. The meeting saw the adoption of a number of resolutions, one against ‘all forms of colonialism and racial discrimination’, and another demanding the reduction of ‘tensions between the two superpowers, general disarmament and the ban of nuclear weapons’.

Bandung bore witness to the first ever coming together of a group of states to officially declare themselves to be the ‘Third World’—as separate from the East and West blocs. The non-aligned movement that developed was initially led by Yugoslavia, Egypt and India, and the constitutive summit of the alliance was organised in 1961 in Belgrade. However, the more countries became involved, the more difficult it also became to underpin this ‘internationalism by states’ with a uniform political agenda.

Following the downfall of the real socialist camp, the non-aligned alliance lost relevance—but this was not the case for individual states involved in the alliance, among them India. China meanwhile holds only observer status, as do the successor states to Yugoslavia. In today’s post-Cold War world order, the non-aligned account for around 55 per cent of the global population. In 2006, the summit in Havana emphasised the need for South-South co-operation. The last summit took place in 2016 on the Venezuelan-owned Caribbean island of Margarita. Nicolás Maduro has held the chair since. ■





## Rooms that are important

True confessions of a reluctant negotiation junkie (or why I persist in climate activism anywhere, everywhere, and so must others) By Tetet Nera-Lauron

I honestly don't know how I would feel whenever I am asked how long I have been 'following' the climate negotiations or how many COPs I have been to. Do I feel proud at being a 'pro', or do I feel embarrassed in this day and age of 'flight shaming' that my carbon footprint may have contributed to global warming with all the flights that I have taken to attend these high-level annual meetings where I am just an observer?

I have been to far too many COPs that's for sure (the next UN climate conference in Glasgow will actually be my 12th!), but yet I can't say that I fully understand the complexities of international climate diplomacy. Or why I can't reconcile all the nice speeches that world leaders make about the need to act on the climate emergency with the fact that after more than a quarter of a century of negotiations, climate change has become an even bigger problem today. But neither could I explain how my heart skips a beat whenever I see developing country negotiators fight so hard to push rich countries to own up to that fact that they have contributed the most to the climate problem through centuries of colonial legacy and the continuing reality of neo-liberal and unjust trade and investment agreements, and should therefore pay up for the massive destruction of lives and livelihoods especially in the global South.

Oh, how my heart has been broken many times over with the unambitious and unjust outcomes at the end of each COP, because I know that with each negotiation session that does not have outcomes that are truly aspirational and responsive to the gravity and urgency of the climate crisis, millions of lives and livelihoods especially in the global South are being put at an even greater risk in addition to our daily battle to live decent lives in the face of poverty, landlessness, joblessness and violations of our human rights. And how angry I am at how corporations are now heralded

as 'key' to climate solutions when in fact it is their unrestrained profiteering through massive extraction of the world's resources that has exploited and oppressed people that we are facing this great existential threat.

I have been part of many conversations among activists on the relevance and effectiveness of international diplomacy, of the United Nations, in solving the many challenges the world faces. On whether we are contributing to the continuing legitimization or the creation of the illusion of hope by 'engaging'. That our energies could perhaps be better channeled organizing and mobilizing on the ground.

Civil society and social movements have adopted the dual tactics of an 'inside-outside' strategy (and I will use this rather simplistic explanation of the 'inside' as lobbying/advocacy for policy reforms, while the 'outside' could be in the form of mobilization, disruption and what could be classified as social movement activities). And I have consciously tried to avoid work in the 'inside', which I felt, was more for policy wonks and nerds.

I have come to realize that as Leftists, we should be able to broaden our understanding and appreciation of the struggle for transformative changes. That it is not a choice between inside or outside, but rather an issue of how Leftists are able to see how these two spaces are inextricably linked, and as such, advocacy and campaigning are both necessary and critical.

There is a need for advocacy in intergovernmental spaces because there is a practical need for reforms that communities facing the worst impacts of climate injustice are demanding—e.g. finance for adaptation, losses and damages. It is civil society's responsibility to raise these issues of people on the ground—especially those who do not have access to these spaces. It is important that civil society watches closely, and to raise the bar on what we expect from world leaders





because negotiations is akin to a game of compromises and horse-trading. Civil society fought hard to have a say in these spaces—our participation—as observers who may access documents, delegations and provide inputs and interventions—was not handed on a silver platter, and even more now as this limited space for policy influencing is fast closing, we should not lose out by default for there are others who will take up that space.

But we should also be clear that what the world leaders are going to produce in this exercise of climate diplomacy is going to completely burn the planet for so long as it is beholden to geo-political, economic and corporate interests. And we should be able to disclose this to the larger global community, in order that we become part of building powerful people's movements and creating a world that is better, more equal and just.

People's solutions to the climate crisis exist, and these are solutions that will also end global inequality. Climate change is ultimately about political economy, and so the answers should go beyond technical discussions on reducing parts per million or keeping global temperatures to a certain level. Climate justice is a holistic, intersectional and multidimensional struggle that enables us to imagine a better world for people and planet.

The United Nations is severely challenged to deliver on this, and continued failure to do so could render it irrelevant, as people will rise up and find hope elsewhere.

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**Tetet Nera-Lauron** is a Filipino climate activist, she is involved in the "People's Movement on Climate Change" and "Climate Justice Now!" Nera-Lauron also works for the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation.

Translation: Cornelia Gritzner

## Las Brigadas Internacionales

In July 1936, when a right-wing military junta staged a coup against the nascent Spanish Republic and plunged the country into civil war, the world sat up and took notice: Spain came to symbolise the confrontation between a left-wing revolutionary workers' movement and the advance of fascism across Europe. Many with left-wing convictions from Europe and beyond, among them authors and intellectuals, voluntarily took part in the struggle.

These initiatives were not centrally co-ordinated. French communists and exiled Italians recruited people via Spain Support Committees, anarchist volunteers fought in the CNT militias, socialist brigadistas in the POUM militia and communists mainly in the PSUC militia. In late summer, the Comintern decided to deploy an International Brigade in support of Spain.

22 October 1936 is considered to be the actual day on which the International Brigades were founded. Within a few months, five entirely non-Spanish brigades were organised to defend the republic. Many volunteers came from France, around 3,000 of whom lost their lives. Approximately 5,000 Germans came, 4,000 Italians, 3,000 Americans and 1,500 Canadians—overall thousands of people arrived from 72 countries. British and French pressure led to the dissolution of the International Brigades in 1938. As a matter of form, fighters were given Spanish nationality and integrated into the regular army.

Often the Spanish brigades are referred to as an example for practical 'proletarian internationalism' unconcerned with party membership or origin and focused on shared objectives. To a certain degree, this was true—but it is in part also a myth. Conflicts within the International Brigades also reflected the different left-wing political approaches, the contradictions between a democratic left, anarchist-sindicalist forces and the Stalinist core in Moscow, between an anti-fascist grassroots movement and communist policy, between social revolutionary expectations and political manoeuvring, and between internationalist claims and nationalist stereotypes that also persisted in the brigades. ■





# In praise of cosmopolitanism

Countering people's forgetfulness of history and their obtuseness

By Tom Strohschneider

Debates on authoritarian trends and nationalist regression now regularly elevate working-class approval for right-wing parties to a kind of act of self-defence. Accordingly, left-wing liberals have simply gone too far with their ostensible moralism when it comes to issues of migration, identity politics and climate protection.

When, against this backdrop, talk then turns to cosmopolitanism, such a worldview hits rock bottom. Allegedly a critical interpretation of social and political contradictions, the discourse itself too often becomes merely part of the struggle between diverse interpretations, i.e. it is more of a position than an analysis. Rejecting cosmopolitanism frequently then also serves to discredit other positions—all too often alleging that these form part of progressive neoliberalism.

What makes such talk so unbearable is people's forgetfulness of history and their obtuseness. Those who today talk about 'evil cosmopolites' evidently would rather turn a blind eye to the worst kind of anti-cosmopolitanism that has gone before. Those who ended up in the line of fire of such propaganda were decried as unpatriotic. Stalin-era campaigns against cosmopolitanism combined this with strong anti-Semitic undertones, calling cosmopolitanism the 'reactionary ideology of the imperialist bourgeoisie'. During the Slánský trial in 1952, inner party rivals were denounced as 'Zionist conspirators and cosmopolites'.

People who use the term 'cosmopolitanism' in complete ignorance of this historical context often also forget to mention a more recent debate that picked up on Immanuel Kant and discussed the development of a just cosmopolitan policy between equals, the perspective of a cosmopolis, i.e. better universal conditions, their normative fundament and legal protection.

This has nothing to do with an alleged 'moral arrogance of the privileged' that the talk of cosmopolitanism targets today, but all the more so with an internationalist perspective.

Anyone willing to take note of the real world must also acknowledge the asymmetry between the global

sphere of the economy and the political constraints of regulation limited to the national level. Capitalism has turned the entire globe into its economic sphere. History has thereby created not only 'the economic conditions to overcome the nation state, it has actually made such a development necessary' (Jörn Schulz). How to implement this transformation remains an open question.

We cannot be blind to the difficulties. Aiming to solve social problems—re-distribution, human rights, climate protection, development opportunities—at the global level does not mean rejecting the existing possibilities of regulation at the nation state level. It is not an either-or choice where we leave one aside to make progress on the other. But towards which objective should we be working?

One example could be fully implementing the democratic socialist conditions that capitalism enables but that paradoxically cannot be completed under capitalism's rule. Precisely in times when value creation has become global, an internationalist perspective that moves in line with economic development will organise wage-earner solidarity across borders. In times when migration has become the norm, it will raise the banner of freedom of movement, so that having a good life does not depend on having the good fortune of being born in the 'right' place. Our challenges are global, and we will thus have to strive for global solutions to our problems.

Such cosmopolitanism would be, in the words of Bertolt Brecht, 'the simple thing—so hard to achieve'. But nobody denies that. The criticism that this is being by far too utopian is raised mainly by those who are quite happy under the current—i.e. nation state-based—conditions. This mistake is not diminished when those who today polemicize against cosmopolitanism regularly adorn their arguments with slogans of class struggle: after all, the Communist Manifesto does not say that people who lose their proverbial chains will win a country; rather, it says, they 'have a world to win'.

Translation by Tim Jack and Nivene Rafaat for lingua•trans•fair



# In search of the lost future

2019 marked a new cycle of global movements. Despite many differences, they also have much in common By Nelli Tügel

Not since the early 1990s has the world experienced such a simultaneous outbreak of generalized anger on the streets as in 2019, a commentator from the Economist noted in early November. That was before Iran and Columbia joined the ranks of countries in which mass protests have terrified governments, forcing many politicians to resign. As recently as the end of November, Iraq’s prime minister Adel Abdul Mahdi declared that he would step down. In doing so, he followed Lebanese Prime Minister Saad al-Hariri (end of October), Algeria’s President Abd al-Aziz Bouteflika, and his counterpart Omar al-Bashir in Sudan (both in April). In Chile, Prime Minister Sebastián Piñera is still in office, but had to announce a restructuring of his cabinet shortly after the rebellions began in October. Ricardo Rosselló, Governor of Puerto Rico, resigned from office in August after mass protests.

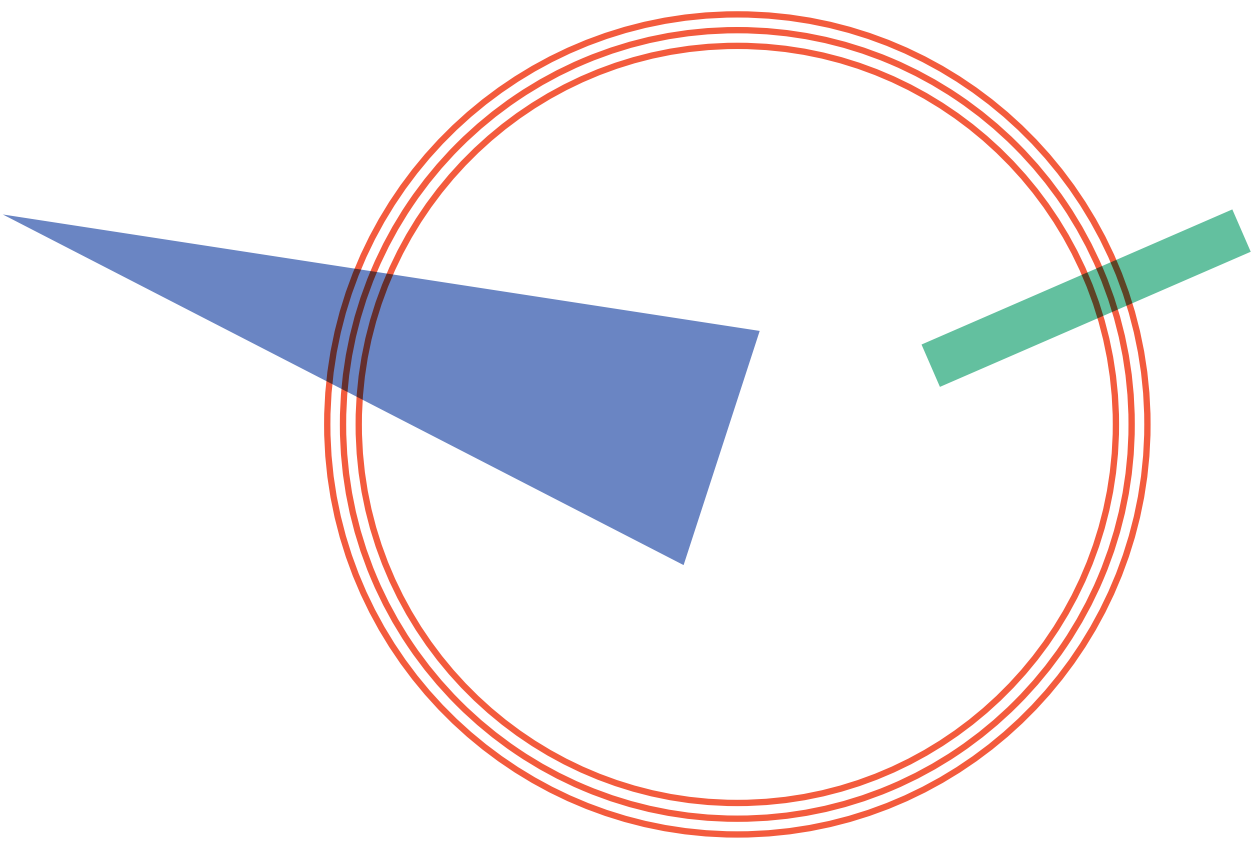
The fact that in many cases the measures which sparked the rebellions were hastily withdrawn attests to the enormous strength of the current protest movements. In Ecuador, this was a decree to liberalize petrol prices and cut workers’ rights, which the government wanted to enact in return for a loan from the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The fact that this loan was roughly equal in value to tax breaks previously granted to corporations and the rich further fuelled the anger of the people on the street. After a military intervention failed to stem the protests on the streets, the government put these plans on hold in mid-October. In Chile and Lebanon, too, planned fare

increases and a planned tax on WhatsApp calls were withdrawn. In France, President Emmanuel Macron postponed a planned fuel tax increase as early as December 2018, shortly after the Gilets Jaunes movement began.

Once they had taken to the streets, protesters in all these countries declined to be quickly pacified again. The immediate causes were only catalysts, giving expression to a more fundamental dissatisfaction. The slogan of the Chilean movement sums it up: “It’s not about 30 pesos, it’s about 30 years”—in other words, the fare increase was just one aspect of a long-misguided policy framework in a country that has been a showroom model of neoliberalism.

Now in 2019, there has been and still is a series of protests in very different parts of the world: France, Algeria, Catalonia, Puerto Rico, Sudan, Haiti, Guinea, Iraq, Hong Kong, Lebanon, Ecuador, Chile, Iran and Colombia. It would be dubious to impose the same analysis on all of these without considering the specificity and heterogeneity of each movement. Nevertheless, the question arises as to whether all these protests have something in common and if so, how this “something” can be described.

First of all, the obvious: social media has become an integral part of twenty-first century protests. It is admittedly quite banal to make this observation nine years after the Arab Spring. But it becomes interesting when social media begins to replace traditional forms of political organization such as parties and trade





## Zapatistas, social forums and summit protests

New cycles of internationalist movements have also surged since the fall of real socialism. Political activism by peasants and indigenous peoples has increased. The Zapatista uprising of the Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN) at the beginning of 1994 was met with global solidarity. The social-revolutionary inspired indigenous uprising demanded fundamental rights, but placed these within an anti-globalisation context: seizing five district capitals was timed to coincide with the coming into force of the NAFTA free trade agreement.

The uprising became a catalyst for social movements around the globe. Five years later, approaches gained momentum that opposed neoliberal globalisation by offering the possibility of 'another world'. Tens of thousands of people protested the WTO conference in Seattle at the end of 1999, and clashes with the police turned violent. Two years later the Italian police shot Carlo Giuliani during protest actions against the G8 summit, hundreds of demonstrators were injured and the abuse people suffered at the hands of the Italian security forces met with broad indignation. The following summits of the self-proclaimed rulers of the world were met with vehement and internationally networked protests.

Since 2001, through a number of social forums, a further internationalist network has developed—from the first World Social Forum in Porto Alegre in Brazil to the first European Social Forum in Florence in 2002 and the first such meeting in Germany in Erfurt in 2005, as well as local social forums.

Another example is the anti-globalisation network Attac that has been active mainly in Europe since its founding in 1998. What began as an Association for the Taxation of Financial Transactions today has around 90,000 members, is active in 50 countries and fights for a far broader set of demands.

Movements that developed in direct response to the great crisis of 2007, such as Occupy Wall Street, have had a similar focus. The crisis has fuelled political processes that have given way to new actors, as much regarding movements—such as Blockupy—as party politics (for example SYRIZA and Podemos). ■

unions, and when debates on Facebook are preferred to face-to-face meetings. This was broadly the case in the "Gilets Jaunes" movement in France, which in a sense opened the current cycle of protests. Here, Facebook was initially the communication tool of choice, but—and this is also instructive—it quickly reached its limits. In the end, the "Gilets Jaunes" chose the format of face-to-face debates on occupied roundabouts and in delegates' meetings. According to the Guardian, as of mid-November more than 15,000 people had already taken part in "cabildos", local assemblies in Chile.

The extraordinary weight of the so-called social question for the global protest movements is also obvious, as is the demand for democratization. Even if both aspects are weighted differently from country to country, they seem to be at least intertwined almost everywhere. It is precisely the combination of anger at concrete measures that are perceived as anti-social, the questioning of the entire political system, and the assumption that the two are interrelated that has proved to be a constant source of inspiration for protest movements.

As mentioned, the trigger for mass protests in Ecuador was an IMF decree, in Chile it was an increase in fares, and in Lebanon a plan for a new tax. In Iran, the overnight increase in petrol prices sparked rebellion, in Iraq high unemployment, in Colombia a neoliberal government package that included the privatization of public assets and the pension system, the abolition of the minimum wage, wage cuts and at the same time corporate tax breaks; in Haiti, too, the desolate social situation and petrol shortages are causing unrest. However, the focus on the social question does not mean that the desires and demands of feminist or indigenous activists lose significance—on the contrary: in Lebanon, Sudan, Chile, Ecuador, or even in the protests against the removal of Bolivian President Evo Morales from office, a great number of women and/or indigenous groups are active. They leave no doubt that the class question cannot be separated from feminist and indigenous demands for equality.

Almost everywhere, the foundations of governments and political systems were very quickly called into question. In Chile, for example, where the constitution drawn up under the military dictatorship of Augusto Pinochet establishes neoliberal economic and social policies as the basis of society, demonstrators are demanding a new constitution to be drawn up by a constituent assembly; in Lebanon, the political system established after the end of the civil war in 1990, which distributes offices within the state along denominational lines, is under scrutiny; in Iraq, party offices as symbols of the hated political system have been attacked and government buildings stormed.

In Algeria and Hong Kong, on the other hand, the protests were initially triggered by attacks on the remnants of democracy: in Algeria, the long-term ruler Bouteflika was met with resistance after he announced his intention to seek a fifth term in office, and in Hong Kong a bill that would allow prisoners to





be extradited to China. In Catalonia, too, progressive democratic demands are closely interwoven with the independence movement and are formulated in opposition to the central Spanish state.

Another similarity between the protest movements is the fact that in most cases, quickly implementing or retracting the measures has not helped the challenged leaders to put an end to the protests. Instead, such concessions encourage the movements to continue. In many places, the protesters have shown astonishing perseverance and stamina: in France, weekly demonstrations have been going on for a year now, in Haiti since February, in Hong Kong since the summer, in Iraq despite extreme repression since the beginning of October, and similarly in Chile. Activists in the capital Santiago de Chile projected the slogan “We won’t return to normality, because normality was the problem” onto a building, neatly summarizing a theme that seems to concern many people who are part of this worldwide revolt.

Many leftists also see the global wave of protest as confirmation that the classic forms of organization of the labour movement—union and party—are now obsolete or have even become a shackle that tends to hold rebellions back. In this context, the current

movements are sometimes described as liberated from ordering and restraining leaders; at first glance, the rapid successes and enormous power they have been able to build up in the streets in a short time seem to confirm this. However, the emphasis on spontaneity may also partly be a projection.

For example, in the case of Chile, at the very beginning of the protests Raúl Zibechi pointed out the ignorance among those who were all too surprised by the mass movement there. According to Zibechi, there have been a number of feminist, student and indigenous protests and attempts at organization in recent years, and the current movement is building on these. Nevertheless, it is true that the uprisings—whether in Iran, France, Chile, Lebanon or Iraq—do not seem to have organizing centres, but rather act more or less spontaneously. Leaders are rejected by many and people’s desire to represent themselves is widespread.

If you look at Great Britain or the US, you will find that here, too, a new generation is up and coming. As a number of industrial disputes in the US have shown, this is stirring up the unions and putting pressure on established parties such as the Labour Party in Britain and the Democratic Party in the US. The new generation is clearly looking for strategies and instruments for successful left-wing and social politics in the very countries of the Global North where Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan took on trade unions and disempowered them in the name of neoliberal hegemony. The identification as working class, which had been declared outdated in the 1990s and 2000s, even by many leftists, is also experiencing a remarkable comeback in the USA, effecting a proud and—in contrast to Trumpism—progressive reconquest of workers’ subjectivities.

This shows that the classical forms of organization still (or once again) have something to offer: they make it possible to transform common experiences into promising strategies. Whether and how the new, spontaneous insurgency movements will succeed in this is still an open question, however. In any case, the simultaneity of both developments—the rejection of leaders and traditional forms of political representation in many places, the return of trade unions and new party-like organization in some—is striking. Taking both of these factors into account prevents premature prognoses about progressive articulation and left-wing organization in the future.

However, it is also true that the current global movements must be viewed in relation to earlier attempts to put an end to injustice and oppression. Otherwise they can hardly be understood. Even if it is not always explicitly articulated, the current protest cycle also bundles reactions to quite different attempts in recent years and decades to establish left-wing politics. In Latin America these are the left and centre-left governments of the 2000s; in Iraq, Lebanon and Algeria the Arab Spring of 2010/2011; in Iran the Green Revolution of 2009; in France the failed trade union struggles of recent years. And last but not least, there is the global experience of the world economic crisis of 2008/2009 and the largely failed



attempts to prevent the poor, women, wage earners and young people of this world from bearing the economic consequences of this crisis. Whether in Hong Kong, Iraq or Chile, the global economic crisis has left its mark on an entire generation for whom something like social mobility is probably only known as something from history books at best, but who are now taking to the streets, to fight for that as well: for being able to put their hopes in a future again at all.

The simultaneity of the movements may be partly due to chance, partly to the fact that revolts are mutually reinforcing, and partly to the fact that the past two decades have seen millions of people on the streets in many places around the world; two decades which have swung between powerful attempts to formulate alternatives, revolts, and brutal repression.

For example, a thoroughly contradictory process has been underway for years in Latin America, an epicentre of the current protests. On the one hand, the right has re-grouped: following the death of Hugo Chávez in 2013 and the loss in the parliamentary elections in December 2015, Nicolás Maduro's government in Venezuela is in a permanent state of crisis. In August of the same year in Brazil, the President of the Workers' Party (PT), Dilma Rousseff, was removed from office. Her predecessor, Lula da Silva, went to prison. Last year's elections were finally won by the far-right Jair Bolsonaro. In Uruguay, on the other hand, the Frente Amplio left-wing alliance recently lost an absolute majority after three legislative periods of stable government. Here a right-wing conservative government coalition is now being announced. On the other hand, the neoliberal Macri government in Argentina has been voted out of office.

Anyone who looks at the uprisings in Chile, Ecuador and Colombia in this context will remember the cycle of protests against neoliberalism which seized the continent at the turn of the millennium and which led to a decade of left-wing governments. Now, however, people have had experience with left-wing and centre-left governments in Venezuela, Bolivia, Argentina, Brazil, Ecuador, Nicaragua and Uruguay—and at times been disappointed. Even if the parties that governed still have a considerable base and people still place their hopes for a better life in the government route, as became apparent in Brazil after Lula's dismissal at the beginning of November, these prospects are likely to be much more subdued than at the beginning of the millennium. The raw materials boom is over and with it the economic basis of those social programmes that led to a significant reduction in poverty in Latin America. In Ecuador, some of the protests were also explicitly directed against extractivism, a term used to describe an extremely environmentally damaging model of development.

In Algeria, Iraq and Lebanon, however, people's experiences with uprisings have been different. The Arab Spring, the movement that brought millions of people from Tunisia, Egypt and Syria to the streets to topple dictatorships nine years ago, resulted in a

phase of brutal reaction—in Syria a civil war lasting for years, in Egypt a military dictatorship. At the same time, the Arab Spring taught an entire generation that despotic rulers can also be successfully driven out.

The uprisings of 2019 have claimed many lives. More than 400 people have already been killed and around 15,000 injured during the protests in Iraq, according to a tally by news agency AFP at the end of November. Internet censorship in Iran has made it very difficult for any news to reach the outside world. However, there have been reports of demonstrators being massacred, for example in the southwest of the country. So far, security forces in Chile have killed 23 people during the protests. In addition, quite a few people have been seriously injured, including some who have lost eyes, as well as thousands of arrests. There have also been deaths and injuries in France, Algeria, Sudan, Ecuador and Haiti.

Despite the at times extreme level of state repression, the people usually cannot be driven off the streets. Their protests produce hope and lasting, impressive images, even across national borders and continents. Whether it be the "Nubian Queen", the woman in Sudan who stood on the roofs of cars and stirred up the crowd with chants; be it the protesters in Beirut, who sang the "Ode to Joy" together; the masked couple in Chile who danced a tango on the street between burning barricades; the thousands of women in Santiago de Chile, who created their own performance to stand up against sexualized violence; or the sooty demonstrator in Iraq who took a seat in a luxurious armchair during a street theatre performance in Basra, wearing a gas mask and helmet. All these images went viral and were viewed millions of times worldwide. The Chilean women's performance against sexualized violence is now being copied by women all over the world.

Why is all of this happening? Because these pictures touch and impress us, because they show how in a world of Donald Trumps, Jair Bolsonaros and Matteo Salvinis, the arrogance of the powerful is met with courage, solidarity and dignity. In Iraq, Lebanon and Sudan, the protest movements have overcome the sectarian and ethnic divisions propped up by the ruling classes in recent decades; women have been and continue to be at the forefront of the protests in Chile, Lebanon and Sudan. The images and slogans show that on the one hand the age of neoliberal hegemony is finally coming to an end, but that on the other hand there are alternatives to allowing extreme right-wing, protectionist and authoritarian forces to fill the resulting political vacuum. Of course, these alternatives have not been fully formulated; for the time being they remain only a hunch. Nevertheless: the search for our lost future has long since begun.

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Translation by Hunter Bolin and Marc Hiatt for Gegensatz Translation Collective





# Painful solidarity

Who or what are we defending? Venezuela, Nicaragua and the Left

By Vincent Körner

‘Hands off Venezuela. Forward to socialism!’ the banner commanded. These slogans, held up to the cameras during a protest at the 2019 European Election Congress of The Left Party, were met with criticism. Left Party politicians distanced themselves from the statements. The tenor of their criticism was that instead of showing ‘unconditional’ solidarity with the government of Nicolás Maduro, they felt it was necessary ‘to stand with the Venezuelan people’.

Although he believed the policies of Trump, Bolsonaro and Merkel vis-à-vis Venezuela were flawed, politician and foreign affairs expert Stefan Liebich said: ‘I also understand the protests against Maduro very well. Venezuela’s system is far from the kind of socialism I would want to see.’ And the party’s Deputy Chairperson Caren Lay said: ‘Not everybody is happy about this indiscriminate and unplanned action.’

‘Do you accept or reject the proposal put forward by the party’s Executive Board?’ Heike Hänsel then asked. A member of parliament, she had taken part in the protest during the meeting of delegates. There had then been no vote on the paper she mentioned. The proposal requested a peaceful solution to the conflict in Venezuela and highlighted the country’s social advances. It also went on to state that the Left Party ‘supports progressive movements, parties and governments in Latin America in their right to choose their own path’.

In fact, this question goes far beyond Venezuela. Can governments such as those of Nicolás Maduro or Daniel Ortega in Nicaragua still be called progressive at all? Does the defence of these regimes not actually hinge on the fact that they are up against the US, arguably the world’s leading imperialist power? And whose interests, needs and hopes does such solidarity ignore? An appeal by left-wing intellectuals published in January set a very different tone: ‘Furthermore, we reject the government’s repression of intensifying protests across the country.’ In Venezuela, the text argued, people were taking to the streets for ‘better food, transport, health, greater political participation, better public services and living wages’. The Venezuelan people were suffering from ‘great insecurity and repression’. In short, the authors ‘rejected the authoritarianism of the Maduro administration’.

Among the first to sign were renowned left-wing intellectuals from Latin America and many other regions, such as Edgardo Lander, Alberto Acosta,

Susan George, Antonio Negri, Miriam Lang, Boaventura de Sousa Santos and Klaus Meschkat. Their appeal sees them fall between two stools: they neither recognised Juan Guaidó, the self-proclaimed President, and thereby the foreign policy line of the US, nor did they support the Maduro administration. The appeal, which evoked the original ideals of the Bolivarian process, was in line with the criticisms many left-wing observers had already been voicing for some time concerning developments in Venezuela—particularly in solidarity with those longing for a progressive transformation in Latin America, one of the beacons of hope for the Left in the Global North. They argued the aborted democratisation process was thereby only one of many problems, such as withheld human rights or the idea that socialist economic planning would inevitably lead to mismanagement. Far more decisive were the long-term political and economic structures, as, for example, argued by Raul Zelik, which were based on oil revenue to fund pensions; an immediate impact was felt at the political level when oil prices fell. Even Venezuela’s left-wing governments had proven incapable of changing this.

The key point of reference for internationalist solidarity are here not a perspective fixed on the leadership and its outward form—a government that calls itself left-wing or that rejects the sphere of influence of some Western superpower. Rather, it is the true substance of policies followed in the country and a perspective from below. The case of Nicaragua is similar. Large-scale protests took place against a government that had once encapsulated the hopes of the left. In Nicaragua too, certain parts of the left also only wanted to see a coup orchestrated from outside, in particular because such an interpretation fitted so well into the old dichotomy of good and evil.

Germany’s “Lateinamerika Nachrichten” wrote that today Sandinism stands for a ‘religiously veiled authoritarian system of government’, leaving no doubt about its disappointment over decades of solidarity with Nicaragua that was once bound to very different ideals: ‘For all those who once sympathised with the Sandinista revolution 40 years ago, supported or even only observed it in the media, it is painful to see revolutionaries lose their aura of credibility.’

Translation by Tim Jack and Nivene Rafaat for lingua•trans•fair



## “It is worth discussing”

An interview with historian Stefan Berger discussing the history of internationalism and the lessons it holds for future forms of global solidarity

*Generally, people trace internationalism's origins back to the early workers' movement and tentative approaches taken in the 19th century. How long has internationalism actually been around?*

**Stefan Berger:** Earlier forms of internationalism do exist. Here we could mention medieval Christian internationalism, an academic form of internationalism that consisted of Europe-wide networks during the humanist and enlightenment periods. In the 19th century, liberal nationalism preceded the internationalism of the workers' movement, and in many cases provided momentum and challenged the internationalism of said movement. Further expressions of internationalism existed in the non-Western, non-European world.

*Were there recurrent motives?*

Attempts at transnational organisation were always related to people with identical or at least similar values grouping across country and/or tribal boundaries. In the 19th century, Christian, liberal, socialist and anarchist transnational organisations were inspired to establish transimperial and transnational bonds. Most of these attempts remained centred on the West; true global solidarity only really appeared in the 20th century.

*When we talk about global solidarity today, people quickly point to the First and Second International. Justifiably so?*

The First and Second International were without doubt highly noteworthy attempts at transnationally organising the workers' movement and, for the first time, seriously trying to implement Marx's 'Workers of the world, unite!' motto. However, the significance of the First International as a forum of discussion was soon overshadowed by the struggles that erupted between two currents within the workers' movement and that would eventually lead to its dissolution.

*And the Second International?*

The Second International was more successful and for the first time attempted joint campaigns, for example for the eight-hour working day or for peace. Transnational solidarity between workers was at the heart of the activities of the Second International. However, it quickly became clear that language and cultural differences between representatives that were owed to different national and imperial contexts represented an important barrier to true communication.

*How did these difficulties become manifest?*

During the conferences of the International, national delegations often kept to themselves and experiences were not shared with representatives who did not speak the same language. Nonetheless, at the symbolic-political level, the International was important and greatly resonated with many workers in the Western world. This fact is highlighted, not least, by the powerful anti-war demonstrations held right up until the summer of 1914, i.e. shortly before the outbreak of World War I. Unfortunately, the war then revealed that, even among workers, nationalism was stronger than internationalism. Many opted for national over international solidarity.

*Karl Marx eloquently polemicized against the limitations of nation states. What effect did he and the growing influence of socialism within the workers' movement have on the early history of the International?*

Officially, the Second International was Marxist, yet it also integrated socialists who were not Marxists. A clear point in case was Karl Kautsky's ingenious formula to admit the British Labour Party in 1908. Even though not all Labour Party members believed in the class struggle, the party, according to Kautsky, nonetheless officially encouraged the class struggle in the UK and



could therefore be admitted into the circle of the socialist parties of the Second International. Yet socialism by far remained the strongest ideological tendency within the Second International. As the Second International never provided a uniform definition of socialism, one would have to speak of multiple socialisms.

*Why did the First and Second International fail?*

While the First International failed due to ideological rifts, it was the outbreak of World War I that finished the second. Many socialists in Europe held great hopes that German social democracy, de facto the most powerful socialist party on the continent (the SPD managed to unite around a third of all voters in the German Empire), would resist the warmongers in the Reich. Yet these hopes were dashed. Many non-German socialists then began to permanently distrust social democracy as a result. In 1914, the SPD closed ranks with the imperial elites. SPD leaders did not tire of justifying this move by pointing to the threat posed by the Tsarist Empire, yet, outside of Germany, their position remained widely incomprehensible. Of course, there were socialists in many European countries who backed their country's decision to enter the war. Only the small Irish socialist party, together with the Bolsheviks, firmly continued to oppose what was in their eyes an imperialist conflict.

*You mention the Bolsheviks. What role did the political left in Russia play in the history of internationalism?*

It is by no means a coincidence that communist internationalism—anti-imperialist and anti-racist in nature and backing colonial peoples' right to national self-determination—became a pioneer of true global solidarity during the interwar period. The Comintern position on these issues set

the international agenda for communism during this time, and it thereby gained much support, in particular in the colonies.

*From today's perspective, Stalin and the Comintern's role are viewed very critically. Obviously, the Comintern's internationalism remained centred on the West, and of course Stalin used the Comintern as a foreign policy instrument to further his own agenda. Yet in comparison to the socialist internationalism of the interwar period, communist internationalism was more markedly anti-imperialist and anti-racist. In South Africa, for example, the Comintern intervened, forcing the leaders of the communist party to embrace an anti-racist focus. After the 1930s, South African communists became the most dogged opponents of the country's apartheid regime, which had held power for so many years. It was therefore no coincidence that in the 1960s Nelson Mandela was a member of the communist party.*

*What has been the legacy of these experiences?*

A future internationalism can draw on these attempts at global solidarity. Such an approach will, of course, have to be based on a recognition and historical analysis of the heinous crimes committed by communist regimes during the 20th century. In today's world, in which nationalism, racism and imperialism are again on the rise, a left internationalism could benefit from highlighting that at least parts of the internationalist left has been attempting to build international solidarity since the 19th century with the aim of overcoming nationalism, racism and imperialism. It is worth discussing what this legacy means for our current reality.



**Stefan Berger** is a historian and has been a professor of social history and social movements at Ruhr University Bochum since 2011. He is also director of the Institute for Social Movements. The interview was conducted by Uwe Sonnenberg.





## A very brief spring

A century on from the founding of the Socialist International Women

By Hannah Hoffmann

In August 1907, the Socialist International Women (SIW) was founded in Stuttgart. From the outset, the organisation was divided. Even at the founding congress, it was clear there would be a right and a left wing. And that while both sides would listen to each other, they would always disagree. It was therefore questionable whether the International would be able to represent the overall interests of women in socialist parties and incite the active participation of women across borders.

Ottillie Baader emphasised that the question of women needed to be considered within the context of socialism. She stood for the struggle of all people exploited, independent of their gender, against all exploiters, equally independent of their gender. Most female German social democrats shared this view.

The discussions within the Socialist International provided a template for those in the SIW. The debates focused on women's suffrage; different views on organisation, forms of working, structure of the International, and conflicts between proletarian and bourgeois demands soon surfaced. Would the aim be a joint struggle by men and women as one class against the capitalist class for the emancipation of women as well as the emancipation of labour from capital, or should the focus be on the unity of all women (Allerweltsbasenschaft), a concept Clara Zetkin clearly did not believe in? Class antagonisms provided no basis for a collective female identity to evolve.

In 1910, the second International Conference of Socialist Women took place in Copenhagen. Unanimously, the conference proclaimed International Women's Day, a success for Clara Zetkin.

With the threat of war looming, an extraordinary session was held in 1912 and Clara Zetkin's demand to declare war on war was again adopted unanimously.

The third conference, scheduled for 1914 in Vienna, was cancelled. Clara Zetkin's demand, published in the paper *Gleichheit*, to prevent and oppose war at

all costs more or less fell on deaf ears. The outbreak of World War I triggered the split of the SIW. The nationalist faction took the lead, and some socialist women's associations forged alliances with bourgeois women on the home front. The debate over war loans also split Germany's female social democratic movement. When, on 4 August 1914, the SPD faction signalled its support in the German parliament (the Reichstag) for the levying of a higher war tax, a split within the party and within the social democratic women's movement was assured.

Rosa Luxemburg then initiated the founding of the group *Internationale* in August 1914, with the group maintaining hope that the SPD could vote against the war loans in parliament. They distanced themselves from the party when this did not occur.

What then followed was a completely different story. The SWI was dead before it could affect change at the discursive level and within the movement. Out of the *Internationale* group, founded in Germany after the failure of the SIW (by Clara Zetkin, Rosa Luxemburg, Käthe Duncker, Bertha Thalheimer and others), the Spartacus League rapidly developed and in 1916 began to clandestinely publish the *Spartacus Letters* (*Spartakusbriefe*). On 1 January 1919, the Communist Party of Germany (KPD/*Spartakusbund*) was founded. The first issue of its journal *Die Kommunistin* was published on 1 May. Its original intention was the desire and will to ally and unite women internationally. Women who were fighting for their rights and against exploitation. Despite being a brilliant idea, at the time there was no way to realise its promise, even in the very long term. The SIW still exists today. Currently the organisation claims to comprise 140 member organisations from around the world.

Translation by Tim Jack and Nivene Rafaat for *lingua•trans•fair*



# Substitutionist internationalism is impossible

The Communist International between hope, heroism, and failure

By Lutz Brangsch

The documents and history of the Communist International (Comintern) have been made available to the German-speaking public in extensive publications put out by Russian and German scholars such as Alexander Vatlin, Vladislav Hedeler and Bernhard Bayerlein. Anyone who rummages through these volumes is likely to be stunned by the contradiction between the inspiring effect this organization had on the Bolsheviks and other left and left-bourgeois movements on the one hand, and how it was instrumentalized by certain interest groups, or rather by the interests of the Soviet state, on the other. These are questions that arise frequently in one form or another and which repeatedly challenge criticisms of the conceptions of organization, solidarity, and internationalism for which the Comintern stood.

The internationalist commitments of the workers movement that Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels set out in the Communist Manifesto were not invented by them, but were already characteristic of proletarian life. The social democratic parties claimed to uphold this tradition until the beginning of the first world war. The reality of the Second International, however, was resolution, not action. It was only logical that this tradition would go on to found a new international after the war. The communist parties that emerged from the split with the old reformist social democracy were not the only ones who pushed for international cooperation. The old social democratic parties, discredited by their active support for the path to war trodden by “their” governments, also revived the idea of an international. The founding of the Comintern did not split the left but gave the really existing division an organizational expression. It united the forces whose internationalist positions made them a minority after 1914.

The foundation of the Comintern was in every respect a fruit of the war. The Comintern was intended to be a radical critique of the “old” social-democratic policies and at the same time consistently put the revolutionary overthrow of capitalist rule at the centre of politics. The idea of a permanent civil war against capital, inspired by the civil war raging in Soviet Russia in 1919, dominated the founders’ thinking. The Comintern re-introduced the question of direct solidarity within the proletariat. The emphasis was on “direct” forms of solidarity, i.e. not mediated through apparatuses, as had been the case in the Second International. Transforming the parties into sections of a world party in the image of the Bolshevik Party was seen as the way forward. Cadre policy, education, strategy development and financing were centralized in Moscow.

However, in March 1919 there could be no talk of a network of established communist organizations. The routes to Moscow were largely blocked, and so the inclusion of participants was haphazard and arbitrary. Only two organizations sent delegates who were in fact able to make the journey from their respective countries. The others were emigrants who were “marshalled” by the apparatus of the Russian Communist Party (Bolsheviks) more or less at random. In Lenin’s view, the young Communist Party of Germany (KPD) should be the Russian Communists’ most important partner. However, the KPD was critical of the idea of such a formation at that time. Rosa Luxemburg justified her rejection of an association on the grounds that the masses still had no organizations which would allow them to decide on the creation of a new international themselves. In accord with his mandate, Hugo Eberlein abstained as representative of the KPD in the vote on the founding of the Comintern.





## Black members of the Comintern

Black activism and African protagonists within the Comintern have only a marginal place in the Left's historic memory. Yet, since the mid-1920s, Germany had in fact been an important site for anti-colonial organising.

Part of this movement was Willi Münzenberg's League against Imperialism, which had organised the Congress against Colonial Oppression and Imperialism in Brussels in 1927. Münzenberg, who belonged to a gifted group of organisers and left-wing media workers, at the time organised events in Berlin with his Workers International Relief, leading also to the founding of a Committee against Imperialist Colonial Policy. Members also included the architect Joseph Ekwe Bilé from Cameroon, who would go on to lead the German section of the French Ligue pour la Défense de la Race Noire, which had been founded in 1924.

Under the umbrella of the Comintern, the Trade Union Committee of Negro Workers was founded in 1928, one active member of which was George Padmore. In 2019 the transnational networks of anti-colonial struggles, the role played by the Comintern and black and/or African protagonists in Germany were the focus of an event by the Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung in Berlin.

As Zurich-based historian Harald Fischer-Tiné explains, 'These early forms of transnational networking in the struggle against colonialism and imperialism survived, and after the end of the Second World War, resurfaced in the movement for Asian and African solidarity'. One such example are the 23 Asian and six African countries who decided at the 1955 conference in Bandung to establish closer co-operation against colonialism and racism, eventually leading to the establishment of the non-aligned movement.

Willi Münzenberg did not live to see these developments: he broke with Germany's ever-more Stalinist Communist Party (KPD), stepping away before pressure from Moscow would certainly have led to his exclusion. He died in 1940 fleeing from the Nazis. The circumstances surrounding his death are still unclear. The Workers International Relief was dissolved by the Communist Party of the Soviet Union's Central Committee in 1935. ■

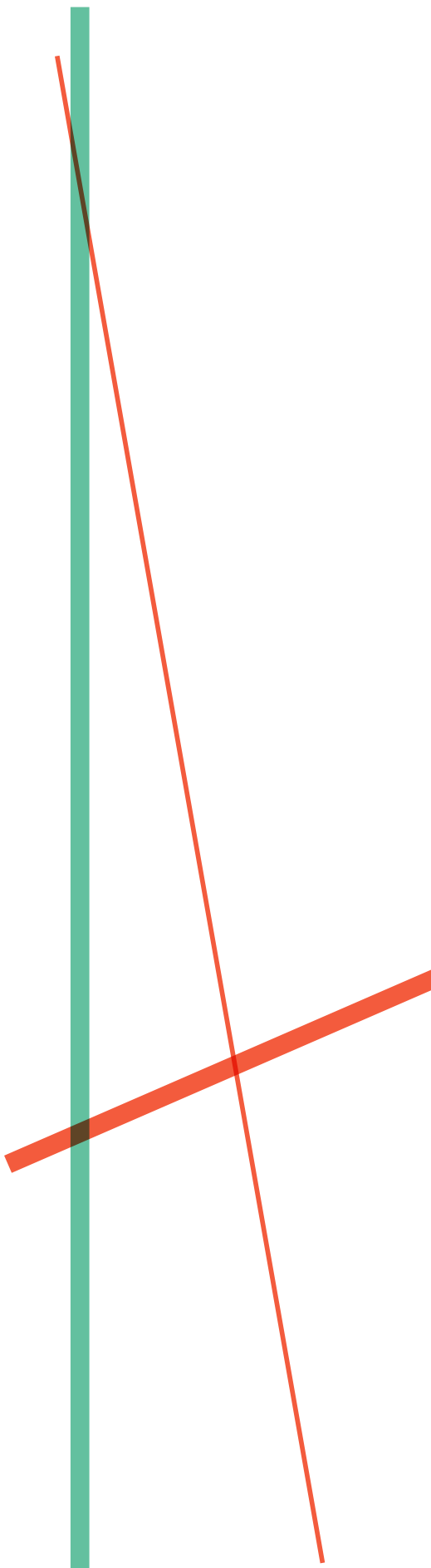
This also suggests that due to the continuity of the personnel, the birth of the Comintern carried within itself the conflicts of the war and pre-war period; both in its relationship to social democracy as well as internally, within the left-wing opposition. It was not only a question of the relationship to a socialist revolution in general or the Russian revolution in particular, it remained rooted in the practical organizational logic of the Second International's decisive weakness: its orientation towards the party apparatuses. Rosa Luxemburg had repeatedly brought up her criticism of the dominance of apparatuses within the parties of the Second International, and her rejection of a hasty founding of the Comintern was faithful to this position. The course of events was to prove her right. Over time, and as a result both of the Comintern's ties to the Soviet national interest and of the country's isolation, this dominance would become even stronger.

With that, two conflicts that were to shape the history of the Comintern had been defined. On the one hand there is a conflict with social democracy, which after the war became a largely unconditional stabilising force for the bourgeois system in many countries. Social democratic party interests merged with state interests. The Comintern, for its part, promoted and organized the same merger with respect to the international communist movement's relationship to the state interests of Soviet Russia or the Soviet Union.

The second conflict concerns the character of socialist revolution and hence also the character of a communist party. This was linked to Luxemburg's criticism of the Russian revolution in 1917. A critical view of the Russian revolution and its lessons was impossible because of the protagonists' close identification with the Soviet national interest. Just as in the 1920s every criticism of the Comintern and Soviet Russia was interpreted as a form of unreserved support for capital and thus for counterrevolution, so every criticism of actually existing socialism would eventually meet the same fate.

But the expediency of this question also allowed the Comintern to break new ground in its analysis of modern societies, in attempts to actually combine anticolonial and anticapitalist struggles, in discussions of the role of women in social struggles, in the development of very practical everyday solidarity, and in other areas—regardless of how successful they may have been. The Comintern's magazines and publishing houses played an important role in disseminating knowledge of society and of social struggles in other parts of the world, and in developing the movement's own culture. Communists from other countries were given the opportunity to study in the Soviet Union. However, it became clear that the post-Lenin leadership of the Bolsheviks primarily viewed this side of the Comintern's work instrumentally. The homogenization of cultural production and its orientation towards the interests of the Soviet state had begun with Bolshevization; now the financial resources of the Soviet Union were used to push the process further. To maintain one's career within the





party, it became increasingly important to have “good connections to Moscow”.

This entanglement of state and movement interests caused considerable difficulties for the individual parties in some cases. Thus the KPD was faced with the impossible task of bringing Germany’s arms and military cooperation with the Soviet Union into alignment with its own antimilitarist course. The shift from the idea of a united front to that of social fascism had disastrous consequences in the resistance against the emerging fascism. The three-way commitments to the Bolshevik party model, the national interest of the Soviet Union and material dependence on Soviet finances formed the Comintern’s Bermuda Triangle.

The Comintern apparatus and the leaders of its various sections were directly involved in the internal conflicts in the Soviet Union from the end of the 1920s onwards. The attempts to regulate the communist movement through finances and ideology were supplemented by the physical annihilation of possible opponents of the Stalinist line. Starting in 1930, these apparatuses were dominated by a climate of fear and self-censorship. This experience determined the behaviour of communist functionaries in the post-war period as well.

The Comintern was thoroughly shaped by the conditions it emerged out of: the logic of war and civil war. The elementary question, still relevant today, is: why was it never able to be overcome? The Comintern disappeared just as it had emerged: unspectacularly and in silence. Reading the May 1943 diary entries of chairman Georgi Dimitrov, one finds that at the beginning of the month the business of the Comintern seems to be running smoothly. On the evening of May 8th, the Soviet Foreign Minister Molotov, the Comintern representatives of the Bolsheviks Manuilsky and Dimitrov meet for a night-time discussion. They reach the conclusion that the organization has become an obstacle to the independent development of its member parties. The functions that had been useful from a Soviet point of view had become part of the Soviet apparatus. The real political issue is not the dissolution, but the lack of any discussion about it. However, the anchoring of the communist movements in the resistance to fascism opened new horizons for alliances and new paths towards a different society. The fact that they were unsuccessful is also due to the fact that a critique of the Comintern remained impossible even after its demise.

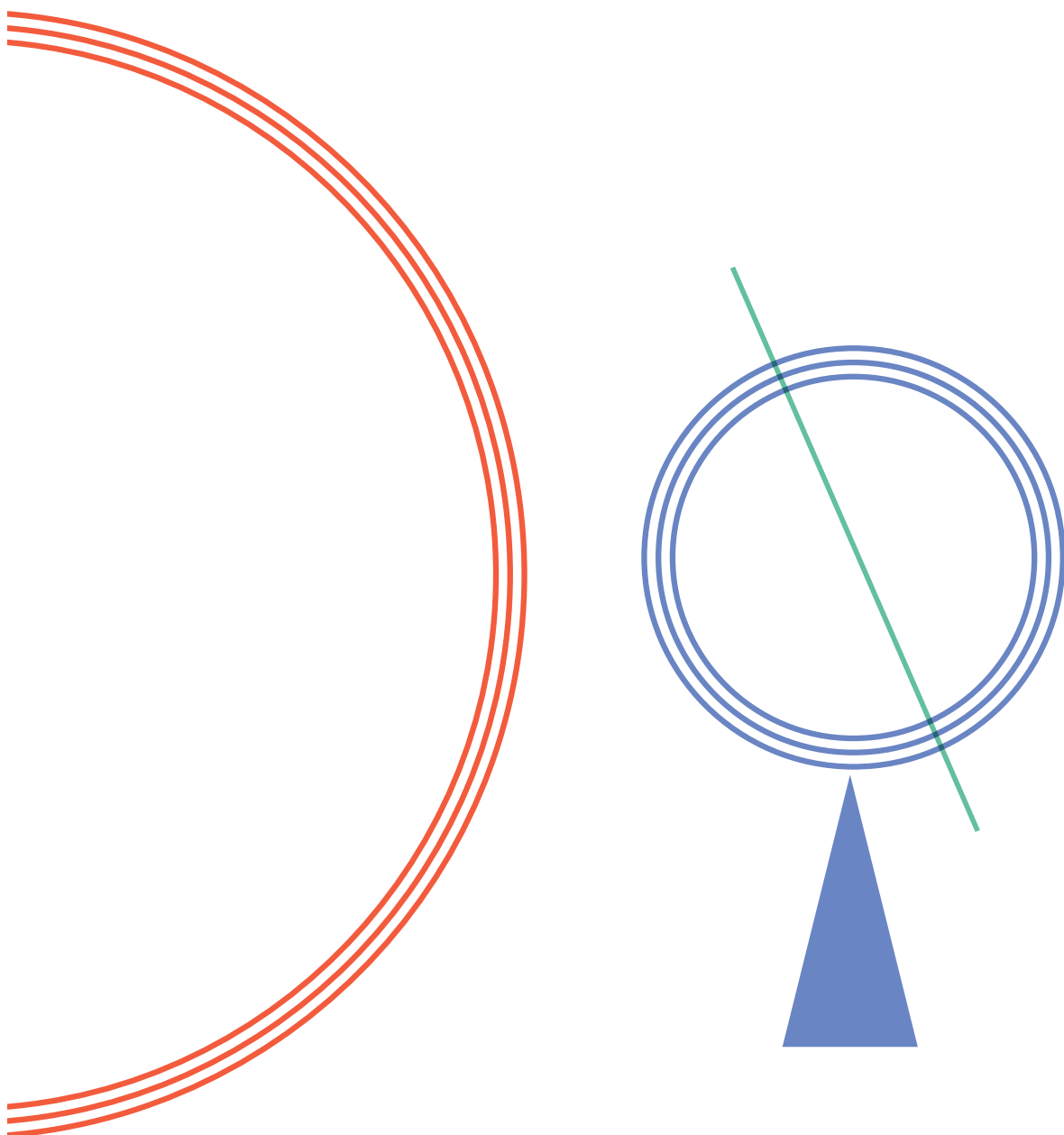
The end of the Comintern led back to its beginning: the Comintern had always claimed that the proletarians themselves should be the ones to organize the revolutionary struggle. In fact, all that remained of that struggle was that a new apparatus was created, which now, after 24 years, could simply disappear. The moral of the story: internationalism by proxy is impossible.

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Translation by Hunter Bolin and Marc Hiatt for Gegendruck Translation Collective





## Goose bumps on arrival

Urs Müller-Plantenberg is a legend of Latin American solidarity work in Germany. In Allende's Chile, he learned first-hand what critical internationalism is

When Urs Müller-Plantenberg left Chile in March 1973, the situation surrounding Allende's government was uncertain and critical. The pro-coup movements had seen their chance: despite the efforts of Unidad Popular to restore normality, the road hauliers' strike in October 1972 and the ongoing boycott by the business community had put the country in a catastrophic position. Bombing attacks against rail lines and electricity networks increased, and president Allende was given no reprieve by the oligarchical press.

At the same time, the US State Department supported plans for a coup d'état in order to prevent Chile

becoming a revolutionary model for the countries of the region—but also for European countries like France and Italy. And as if all this wasn't enough, there were also disagreements and rifts within the left over the Chilean path to socialism and how it should be paved.

In the lead up to the parliamentary elections of spring 1973, Müller-Plantenberg wrote: "If the parties of Unidad Popular want to convert their votes into more representatives and senators, they must try to divide the opposition, while at the same time maintaining their own unity. One should not forget that



the distribution of votes depends less on the machinations of the opposition than on the political program that the government and the parties of Unidad Popular implement in their remaining months in office.” Not long afterwards he returned to Germany and was a founding member of the “Chile-Komitee” (Chile Committee) and the journal “Chile-Nachrichten” (Chile News), that sought to raise awareness in solidarity with the Allende government.

Müller-Plantenberg’s close relationship with Chile had begun long before these events. In 1968 his wife Clarita Müller-Plantenberg had been given the opportunity of a research stay in Talca, a city in the centre of southern Chile. She accepted under one condition: “I will go if my partner can come with me.”

After their arrival in Talca, they both began working in the Institute for Agricultural Training and Research (ICARA). Their research was focused on analysing particular aspects of the agricultural reform undertaken during Eduardo Frei Montalva’s time in office. Clarita focused on the problem of impoverished women, while Urs looked at the reactions of big landowners, the “cadavers of the land”, who were organizing to halt the societal changes sweeping the country.

Before his work as a researcher in Chile, Müller-Plantenberg had been socially and politically active in Germany. He was active in the Socialist German Student Union until his expulsion in 1965, and later in the Republican Club. Both of these were non-parliamentary left-wing organizations campaigning against authoritarian and racist structures in Germany, while also supporting liberation movements in the Third World. During these politically formative years he came to know Klaus Meschkat, Rudi Dutschke, Gastón Salvatore, Alex Schubert, Hans Magnus Enzenberger, and others.

The most important person he got to know during his first visit to Chile was without a doubt the critical theologian and economist Franz Josef Hinkelammert. In the 1960s and 1970s Hinkelammert was an important point of contact, especially for German internationalists. The Müller-Plantenbergs returned to Germany before the election victory of Unidad Popular in 1970. Their research project in Talca was over, but their relationship with Chile had just begun.

In early 1972 Jaques Chonchol, then head of the Centre for Studies on National Reality (CEREN) at the Catholic University in Santiago, asked his friend Hinkelammert if he knew a German sociologist who could examine the effects of Unidad Popular’s economic policy. The Chilean government had a keen interest in finding out whether the population’s purchasing power had increased and what exactly they were buying. Hinkelammert called Müller-Plantenberg in Berlin and said in a somewhat commanding tone: “You must return to Chile.”

At the time of the Müller-Plantenbergs’ second arrival in Chile, Allende had already been in government for more than two years. Urs immediately began his work at CEREN, where he found himself in an open and cosmopolitan environment. Researchers from Belgium, Argentina, Bolivia, and Spain together

## Allende’s International

When, on 4 September 1970, the left-wing electoral alliance Unidad Popular garnered 36 per cent of the vote and became the strongest force in parliament, Chile reached a turning point that captured international attention. Everyone knows how this left-wing democratic experiment played out: three years later the military staged a coup against President Salvador Allende and Pinochet’s US-backed junta went on to murder thousands and unleashed a neoliberal counterrevolution.

In 2020, on the 50th anniversary of Unidad Popular’s electoral victory, we will not only recall the many memories of Chile’s new era and the events that led to it. Much has been forgotten, says Nils Brock from the cross-media internet project Allendes International, such as the strengthening of the Chilean workers’ movement, the consolidation of unions, feminist interventions and much more. As Nils Brock highlights, we must not forget, ‘that at the time many people and grassroots groups around the world regarded Chile primarily as an alternative to the dogmatism of many national CPs, the USSR and the authoritarian facets of the Cuban Revolution’.

Activists, reporters, dissidents, aid workers, academics and many others came. They helped with the agricultural reform, developed concepts to improve literacy rates, taught children or advised the government. As he says, until today, a systematic analysis of the experiences of these international supporters is lacking, a lacuna the Allendes International project aims to help close.

The project is a co-operation between the Nachrichtenpool Lateinamerika e. V. and the Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung. Who were these thousands of enthusiasts from across the world who rushed to support Unidad Popular? The project provides answers: there are interviews, photos, texts, videos, music and much more. The project would also like to invite people to participate. Further information is available here: ■ [internationalallende.org](http://internationalallende.org).



tried to develop theories that went hand in hand with the societal and political changes that were happening at the time.

Müller-Plantenberg wrote a series of critical texts that questioned the overly optimistic forecasts of the socialist Minister of Economic Affairs Pedro Vuskovic. For example, he established that state intervention in production had improved the situation of the working class, but that this did not lead to automatic growth in production and purchasing power, and nor did the consumption habits of the formerly poor change in the ways desired—many people just ended up buying more cigarettes instead of fresh fruit and vegetables.

CEREN and the Centre for Socio-Economic Studies (CESO) at the University of Chile were important hubs for internationalist networks in which the processes of societal change were analysed from a global perspective. At CESO it was primarily Brazilian Marxists who kindled a debate about Latin America's social transformation in the context of capitalist dependence and inherited colonial structures. For its part, and perhaps due to its proximity to the government, CEREN focused on concrete social challenges and, among other things, conducted research on Chilean mass media, agricultural reform, the indigenous population, and the farm worker's movement, but also on the life of young people in the cities, Christian-socialist currents, and the societal role of culture and the universities.

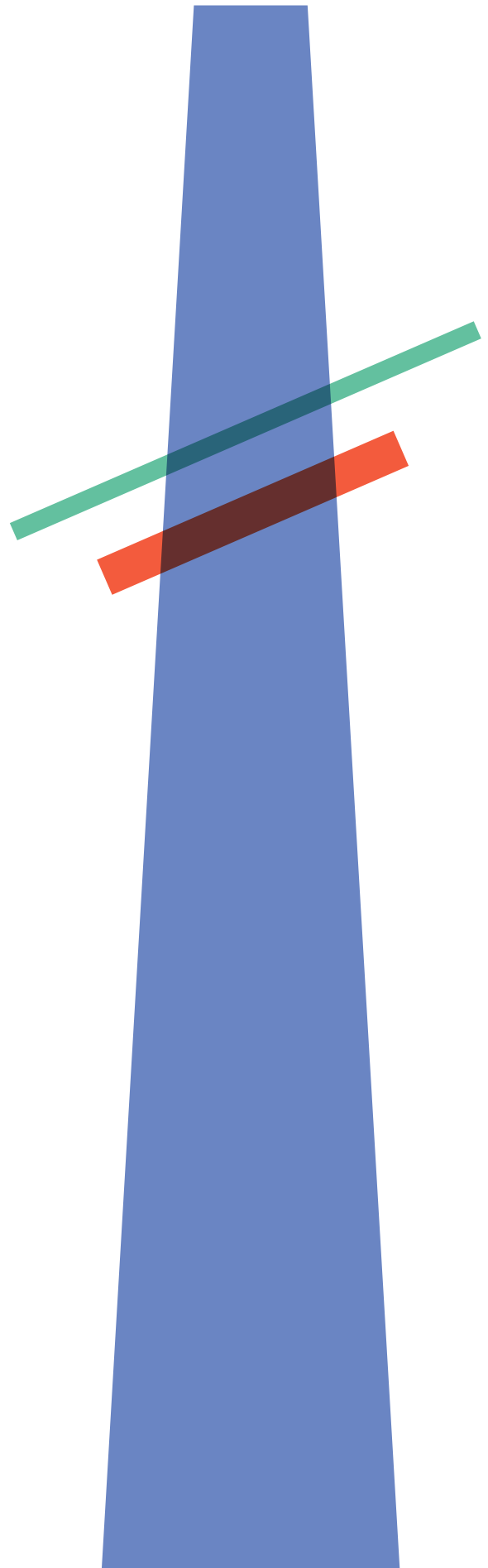
After his return to Berlin in March 1973, Müller-Plantenberg resumed his work at the Institute for Latin American Studies (LAI) at Freie Universität Berlin. He was sitting at his desk in his office when he heard about the coup by the Chilean military on the radio. He immediately began organizing a demonstration in Berlin, which 20,000 people took part in the very next day. As painful as it was to witness the violent end of Unidad Popular, in subsequent years Müller-Plantenberg participated all the more actively in solidarity with Chilean exiles. In 1974 he took part in establishing the Centre for Research and Documentation Chile-Latin America (FDCL). As a specialist in Latin American studies and Professor at the FU, he played a significant role in the further consolidation of the LAI, where he taught students from Europe and Latin America for over 30 years.

Those who attended parties at the institute in the 1980s remember him fondly as a guitarist and dancer, invariably with a glass of red wine nearby, and never above cleaning up until the early hours of the morning. He himself likes to remember the intense period of the Unidad Popular and the goose bumps that he felt shortly after his arrival in Chile, when he heard the following lines of a song on the radio: "Because this time it's not about replacing the president, but the people of the country creating a new, completely different Chile..."

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A longer version of this text first appeared in the online project "Allendes Internationale".

Translation by Markus Fiebig and Kate Davison for  
Gegensatz Translation Collective





# It wasn't the collapse of the Berlin Wall that liberated Mandela

The story of democratic struggle in South Africa was written by the activists involved—and by solidarity **By Andreas Bohne**

It is 11 February 1990. In Paarl, near Cape Town, thousands of people and a vast number of representatives from the international news media are waiting in front of the Victor Verster Prison. Then, Nelson Mandela steps outside—his first steps as a free man after almost three decades in prison. Together with his then wife Winnie, he approaches the crowds of people, who start cheering. The pair raise their fists in the air. The images are seen around the world.

Why had Mandela been released? One view that has stubbornly persisted is that the “global turning point” marked by the fall of the Berlin Wall—and with it the collapse of “really existing socialism” in Central and Eastern Europe—led to the defeat of apartheid.

Indeed, 1989 and 1990 marked a turning point on the African continent as well as in Europe. This period is often described as a “wave of democratization”, a time of multiparty democracy and peaceful changes of government—even though authoritarian regimes remained in power. Proxy wars between the East and the West came to an end. In 1990, Namibia became the last colony on the African continent to gain independence. These years were also of critical importance for South Africa. But it was not the fall of the Berlin Wall that freed Mandela. Doubtless, such external factors as the break up of Eastern Europe also played a role on the “Cape of Good Hope”. Yet there were other decisive forces that led to the fall of apartheid. Those who ignore these other, far more significant moments, without which it would not have been possible to overthrow a racist, capitalist regime of oppression that was enshrined in law, are distorting the entire historical picture.

The impact of transnational anti-apartheid solidarity, in particular, cannot be ignored. Individual and collective action brought everyday and institutional racism to light. In many Western countries, the complicity of their own governments with the apartheid regime was strongly criticized, which led in some cases to sanctions and boycotts that hit the South African government hard.

On top of that, internal contradictions within South Africa intensified. The massive military expenditure plunged the country—once a hallmark of the mining-industrial complex—into a desolate economic situation. By the end of the 1980s, despite loans from US-American and European banks, the country was barely economically viable.

Looking back, the armed fight against the apartheid regime must also be acknowledged, of course. In fact, it was never the decisive factor. But as anti-apartheid

activist Shirley Gunn in *Voices from the Underground* has recently reminded us, local groups—in her case, the Ashley Kriel Detachment—carried out attacks that had a highly symbolic character, but no fatalities. Among other things, they detonated a limpet mine in the Castle of Good Hope in Cape Town, the headquarters of the South African Army's Western Cape Military Command.

The political struggle of the African National Congress in exile should also not be forgotten. Cooperation with other countries led to a binding, UN-level arms embargo against South Africa in 1977. We should also remember the many South African activists, the opposition coalition of the United Democratic Front (UDF), and the trade union federation COSATU, founded in 1985. In particular, we must acknowledge the decades-long people's resistance. Besides the Soweto uprising of 1976, this included a multitude of other acts of revolt and resistance that few people outside South Africa are aware of, such as the Mpondo Revolt in the former state of Transkei in the 1950s and 1960s.

It was the broad mass of the population that shook the apartheid regime through countless demonstrations and protests over the course of many years, and their power that contributed to making the country ungovernable. It was the broad mass of the population that, in 1989 and 1990, created the conditions that enabled the negotiations that for years had been conducted behind closed doors to reach a conclusion, and for Mandela to finally be released. The ban on the ANC and the South African Communist Party had been lifted shortly beforehand.

Overcoming apartheid therefore had much less to do with the fall of the Berlin Wall than people often assume. And—no matter how much former South African President Frederik Willem de Klerk may like to peddle the idea—Nelson Mandela's release was not the result of events in Eastern Europe or the GDR.

Remember: Mandela had already received an offer of release from prison in 1985, but under conditions that he declined at the time. By 1986, the fight against apartheid on the streets of South Africa had reached a peak when a state of emergency was declared. The escalation of violence at that time already marked the beginning of the end for the racist apartheid regime.

If this continues to be omitted—that is to say, if overcoming apartheid continues to be conflated with the fall of “really existing socialism”—it also has an effect on how the racist regime is understood: it will continue to be seen as a so-called “bulwark against



## Apartheid No!

Solidarity with the anti-apartheid protests left its mark on generations in both East and West. An anthology published by Andreas Bohne, Bernd Hüttner and Anja Schade *Apartheid no! Facettes of solidarity in East and West [Apartheid No! Facetten von Solidarität in Ost und West]* now recalls this movement.

It describes in great detail a wide variety of activities: from boycotts by the West German anti-apartheid movement to activities by the GDR at the UN and the international networking of solidarity work. It even touches on the personal motivation of those who fought for the ANC and freedom for Nelson Mandela. 'A critical appreciation of anti-apartheid solidarity activities, as presented here, must therefore also give room to uncomfortable views,' a text in the anthology warns. This includes recognising that with regard to the GDR, 'we are dealing with a paradox: while people showed solidarity and demanded "freedom" for the majority of the people of South Africa, the GDR did not grant fundamental democratic rights and guarantee human rights standards for its own people'.

However, the anthology also looks to the future: anti-apartheid solidarity was a 'central reference point for internationalism' that had 'motivated diverse left-wing movements during the Cold War globally,' Boris Kanzleiter writes in his contribution. After the 'end of the confrontation between the two major blocs and the crisis of socialism,' the question is now 'how, against the backdrop of the current political context, a new internationalism could be defined on the political and organisational level'.

The anthology is also supplemented with pictures, posters and interviews with witnesses to show what solidarity looked like (available on the project website: [apartheid-no.de](http://apartheid-no.de)). This online archive presents the perspectives of East and West German activists and the contexts, forms, actions and topics of solidarity at the time. Order the book at [rosalux.de](http://rosalux.de). ■

Communism". According to this distorted (and distorting) view of history, when Communism failed in Eastern Europe—that is, when "the enemy was defeated"—its allies in South Africa could also have been released.

No: the history of South Africa's liberation was not written somewhere else; it was written by the people who were there. The years that followed Nelson Mandela's release were filled with turbulence, with the "negotiated revolution" and conditions that were, in part, akin to those of a civil war. It was not until the first free elections in 1994 that the ANC was finally able to claim victory and Mandela was sworn in as the country's first black president.

However, it became apparent soon afterwards that the political upheaval would not be followed by economic transformation. More than ever, the situation in South Africa was being determined by economic disagreements and social inequalities; on top of all this were the continued class-specific and racial divisions.

Despite the fact that no other African country spends as much on social security, housing, pensions, or child benefits, despite the introduction of an internationally observed reconciliation process, and despite the progressive constitution that South Africa can boast—clearly none of this was enough to bring about a more fundamental kind of political change. What followed the fall of apartheid in South Africa was the dominance of capitalism, for which—apparently—"There [was] no alternative". South Africa also lacked a new, left-wing project; the collapse of "really existing socialism" evidently left its mark here as well. Many hoped that a just, cosmopolitan, and emancipatory society would emerge from the rubble of a country that had managed to abandon apartheid, but these hopes were dashed.

This was a hope shared by many South Africans and members of the international left after 1990. It is possible that, in the process, something was naively projected onto South Africa. This can be seen as much in the often overused metaphor of the "rainbow nation" as in the fact that there were also members of the left in South Africa who hoped for a socialist transformation—and who themselves failed in precisely that project.

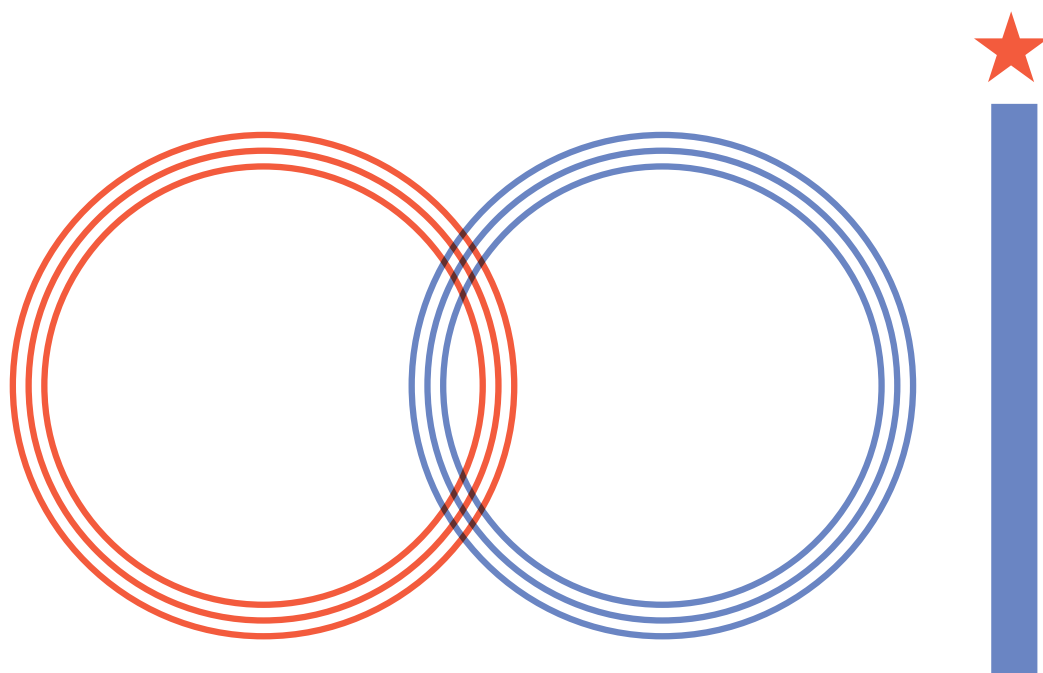
Nevertheless, the fact remains that a social and economic transformation in South Africa that addresses issues of ownership and distribution in a progressive manner and leads to the dismantling of long-standing social structures seems more necessary today than ever before. Many of the current protests—now being waged against a democratically elected government and against the country's economic elite—are also moving in this direction. And, once again, the political hope lies with the South African people and with international movements.

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Translation by Louise Pain and Kate Davison for Gegensatz Translation Collective





## The same, but different

The Solidarity Service International originated in East Germany. But genuine solidarity does not end with the collapse of a social system By Kathrin Gerlof

If we want to internationalize redistribution, the term “internationalism” is pretty well suited. Sarah Ninette Kaliga, Managing Director of SODI explains: “Of course this is the case, even if we don’t actually use the term directly. It’s not without reason that the word ‘solidarity’ features in our name.”

Concepts are important to help us understand what SODI does and what it prefers not to do. “We don’t want to develop anyone so we don’t refer to ‘development aid’ when talking about our work. Those who come to us develop their own projects. Our work is focused on the situations in which these people find themselves and has nothing to do with our aspirations about how they should be or what they should do. In other words: We don’t know any better. But, we can work together.”

Cooperation means facilitating and supporting independent initiatives together with civil society initiatives and organizations to foster the potential of organizations to implement existing solutions independently. These are local projects, implemented with SODI’s support, which in the best case scenario enable continuity and success. Of course, some projects are more effective at achieving this than others.

Sometimes, as is the case with Mozambique, the projects involve an entire town twinning arrangement. This particular one has become something of a success story allowing people to work together and learn from one another. In the case of Mozambique this was the best and most promising way of developing something on equal footing, says Sarah Ninette Kaliga.

Today SODI has concluded or continues to support over 1,000 projects. Currently the organization is active in 12 countries. Considering that the association has only existed since 1990, that’s quite an achievement. Now would be the right time to give an overview of the organization’s history.

SODI’s roots, which proved to be both burden and opportunity at the same time, were in the Solidarity Committee of the German Democratic Republic. This was a legally independent organization under the control of the Central Committee of the Socialist Unity Party (SED) which had the remit of coordinating the country’s development aid activities. This meant helping countries in the struggle against imperialism, pushing through foreign policy objectives, and fostering economic development wherever it was hoped that socialism could be established. Founded in 1960, the Committee was funded by voluntary citizens’ donations collected through the Free German Trade Union Federation (FDGB). Here, voluntary was a very elastic concept, since anyone who refused to cooperate was certainly made to feel the consequences.

After disputes with the Treuhandanstalt (trust agency responsible for the privatization of East German enterprises), in 1990 SODI was allowed to invest the 32 million Deutschmarks they had collected in donations into the Stiftung Nord-Süd-Brücken, created in 1994. This private non-profit foundation continues to exist to this day. By then, SODI e.V. had already been around for four years. As a founder, the association invested the available donations and on this basis began to consolidate what remained of the



previous organization that had not dwindled away with the end of the GDR. Initially it did this without institutional funds but had financial support from donations and supporting members and a desire, working with as many partners as possible, to become actively involved in networks and use its ambivalent legacy to demonstrate active commitment in the spirit of solidarity. And so it proved possible to develop the foundation. The idea, the concept of solidarity and of internationalism, did not disappear with the GDR. Something was still alive. In fact, something quite substantial.

Today there are association members, supporting members, and local groups, and the association secures its own funding. SODI is a member of various coalitions and umbrella associations for development aid and participates in networks.

“We have reinvented ourselves and, at the same time, still managed to take a lot of what existed before and keep it going, open it up for discussion again, reorganize it, and develop an independent self-concept. Many countries where the former Solidarity Committee was also active have remained part of our remit: Vietnam, South Africa, Laos, and Mozambique. This is the part that represents continuity. But at the same time, we have developed a different, non-paternalistic understanding of cooperation”, says Sarah Ninette Kaliga. “It’s all about sustainability—social, economic, environmental. Above all, our objective is for people facing poverty and environmental destruction to be able to independently advocate for a fairer world. And this should be possible in the countries where they live, in cooperation with others, and ideally not just in the context of a short-lived project, but permanently.”

In addition to securing continuity of what already existed, SODI also took on new fields of work, in a world where, as the association says, “many people have no or only limited access to opportunities for political participation and to social, economic, and cultural resources”. One could also add that the world referred to is one where heroes are no longer that easy to find.

This is, after all, also part of the history of SODI: liberation movements and the names associated with these movements in some cases became authoritarian structures, or even worse heroes became rulers, and once-promising developments became countries devastated by civil war and poverty.

These cases are counterbalanced by “islands of hope” and ongoing projects. It is above all this continuity that is so difficult to achieve, which also has something to do with the need to repeatedly procure funds. These funds come from foundations, the German Ministry of Development, from donations from sponsoring members, and from various other individuals. The Stiftung Nord-Süd-Brücken is also frequently approached about new projects or the continuation of existing ones, particularly educational projects.

One of the most fascinating projects, partly because it is one of the most challenging due to the deep-rooted prejudices that have endured around the world

for centuries and to which the Left are often also not immune, is entitled “Work and a Future for the Roma” and is being implemented in Serbia. It was not so long ago, recalls Sarah Ninette Kaliga, that the Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung was invited to visit Belgrade to learn about the work of the Roma organizations based there.

This led to the idea of developing neighbourhood centres together with the Roma. Local lawyers, social workers, psychologists, the partner organization Roma Forum Serbia, SODI, and other partners developed practical strategies and implemented them, for instance in the Serbian city of Požarevac where approximately 7,500 Roma (around one-fifth of the city’s population) live in precarious conditions. Racist violence, discrimination by government institutions, poor or even entirely absent educational opportunities, barely any job opportunities, no official papers—for generations there seems to have been no way out of this vicious circle. The project therefore focuses on access to education, the search for employment, dealing with trauma, strengthening small businesses and entrepreneurship, and, of central importance, helping people acquire ID documents. Women particularly benefit from this type of support which does not present a preformed concept but rather takes up the ideas of the people who are at the heart of all this and helps them to implement those ideas.

The project is also due to be expanded to Albania and Kosovo in the near future, says Sarah Ninette Kaliga. “Roma are the biggest minority in Europe. And they are also the most discriminated against and the poorest group. There is very little interest in doing anything to address the situation. On the contrary, over recent years the Roma’s circumstances have actually deteriorated, as is demonstrated by the situation in countries such as Hungary.”

For two years now, SODI has supported a “tea project” in India developed in cooperation with the local partner organization CTRD. The project was initiated by the Adivasi who live in the Nilgiri Mountains in Tamil Nadu in southern India and whose living conditions are very challenging. The establishment of tea cooperatives and an independent tea factory for the production of certified organic green tea has provided 500 smallholders with economic security and a self-sufficient and dignified life.

Is this solidarity? Is this the *modus operandi* of internationalism? “If internationalism needs movements then it should be looking to those advocating for redistribution. This is what everything revolves around,” says Sarah Ninette Kaliga. “Our newest campaign will be called ‘An economy for everyone’. We don’t necessarily have to grow but we must progress our thinking, we must become more political. We have always been a little cautious in that respect. We should be talking more about justice and fighting for it. That’s what we would then call internationalism. Although I do also find the word ‘solidarity’, as it appears in our name, particularly attractive and apt.”



# “Yes, we’re reaching for the stars!”

Alex Wischnewski on the prospects for a Feminist International—as a goal, as a movement, and above all as possibly the strongest force we have today

*There are plenty of good reasons to think about and discuss the idea of a Feminist International. Which ones would you emphasize?*

All around the globe, we can see many robust and confident feminist frameworks, all of which have helped put feminism on the agenda. Efforts to trivialize feminism and make it invisible are ongoing. But in light of all the movements and struggles worldwide, this is simply no longer possible. Refugee and migration movements are also pushing for a new internationalism that is feminist by necessity. I believe feminist movements provide answers to many pressing questions. They go far beyond the so-called classical women’s issues. The “Fridays for Future” movement, for example, is clearly a feminist movement.

*But when we talk about a Feminist International, it sounds like we are reaching for the stars.*

Of course we’re reaching for the stars! And so we should be. There’s so much potential for us right now, but it’s not going to happen on its own. Many of the challenges are global. Even if they differ at a national level, the solutions we find must be global. Mutual inspiration and solidarity between movements is particularly important—to know and learn from each other. But the search is on for something that goes beyond that. That’s where we come in.

*Who do you mean when you use that beautiful word “we”?*

I’m talking about feminists led by women who seek to overturn all the conditions under which the human being is but a “debased, enslaved, abandoned, despicable essence”, as Marx put it. That is the guiding principle. That’s what I mean when I say “we”. And then, of course, there’s “we” as an invocation. But feminist movements have to find a balance between the desire to unify as quickly as possible in order to be effective, and the painful experiences that this has often brought about. Black women’s movements or transfeminine movements and the whole debate

around intersectionality have made it clear: our positions are different.

*Can you give us an example to illustrate this?*

Racism and other ideologies determine how we are affected, but also what we can do. Take white women who stand up and fight against domestic violence, for example. In the 1970s and 1980s, Black women said: We can’t discuss this openly; our men are already so criminalized that we can’t just walk around and talk about how they beat us—it would become so racially loaded and therefore wouldn’t make us safer. This demonstrates that we have different starting points. This has consequences for our political strategy. But it is still necessary to try to work towards finding common ground, to form alliances, to really show solidarity, and not to keep particular identities separate from each other. These debates are being held today in many feminist movements. There is no other way.

*This requires immense openness. Much more than a situation where we could already say: This is what we want, this is what we must do, this is the goal. Do you see this openness in the movements?*

Having and supporting this kind of openness is a feminist stance in and of itself. I think the way in which politics is done is a question of feminism.

*What do you mean by that?*

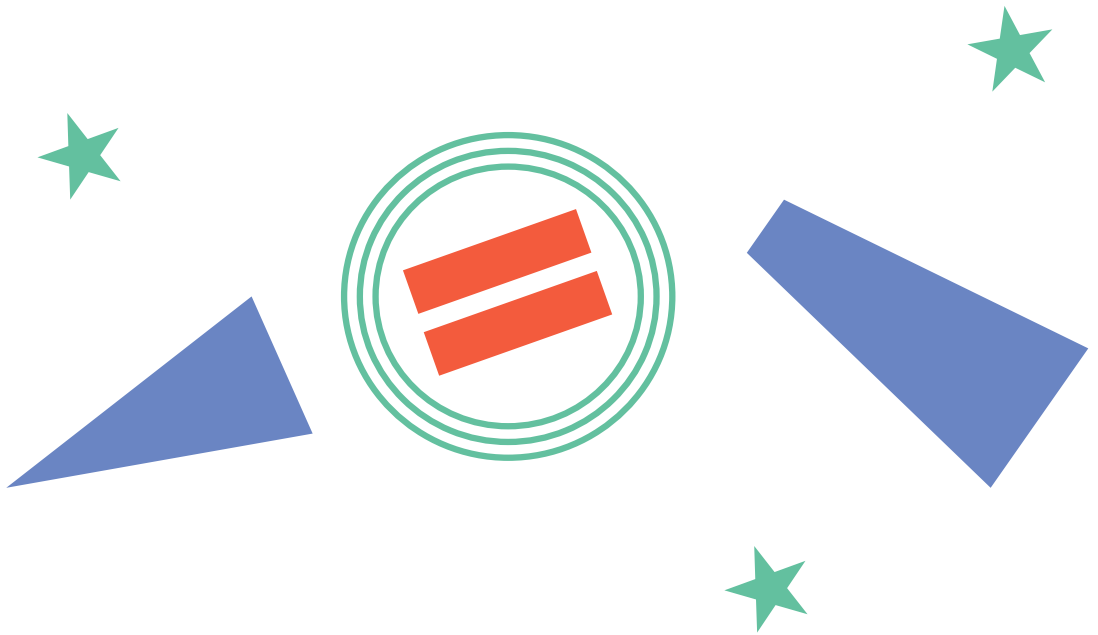
There is a debate about the feminization of politics, which is about how accessible our structures and processes are, how we talk to each other, how different concerns are taken seriously, how hierarchies can be dismantled. That’s what I’m talking about. It is no longer just women talking amongst themselves, it is something being negotiated with lots of people within the processes of political participation. That is why feminist movements are so strong. Of course there are limits, even within the movements.

*When was the last time you encountered the kind of openness you’re talking about?*



**Alex Wischnewski** works on transnational feminist movements for the Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung. She co-founded the network Care Revolution and the platform #KeineMehr (#NotOn-eMore) and was co-organizer of the Women’s Strike on 8 March 2019. She was interviewed by Kathrin Gerlof and Anne Schindler.





*What makes you so optimistic that it is real?*

When we organized for the feminist strike here in Germany, there was and still is a debate about whether we need one or perhaps up to three demands that we all have in common. It quickly became clear that this was the wrong way to do it. Our questions are simply too different. And it is good that this is not just assumed, but that we really talk about it as well. Some people are fighting for better wages in the nursing sector, others for the right to be allowed to work at all. We must understand each other and make it clear that everything is connected, that we still belong together, because we have to take all social relations into account. This resulted in a very long list of demands. Some people did not understand this, so the discussion continued.

*In September the Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung will organize an international feminist networking meeting—a festival—in Essen. This will also be an attempt to discuss feminist issues in as broad a manner as possible, in an open and honest way—with no “safety net”, so to speak.*

We hope to strike a balance between welcoming a diverse crowd of people while also clarifying what we have in common—to point out that there is already a lot going on right now, but many initiatives remain unconnected; that we need time to get to know each other, to listen to each other and not to

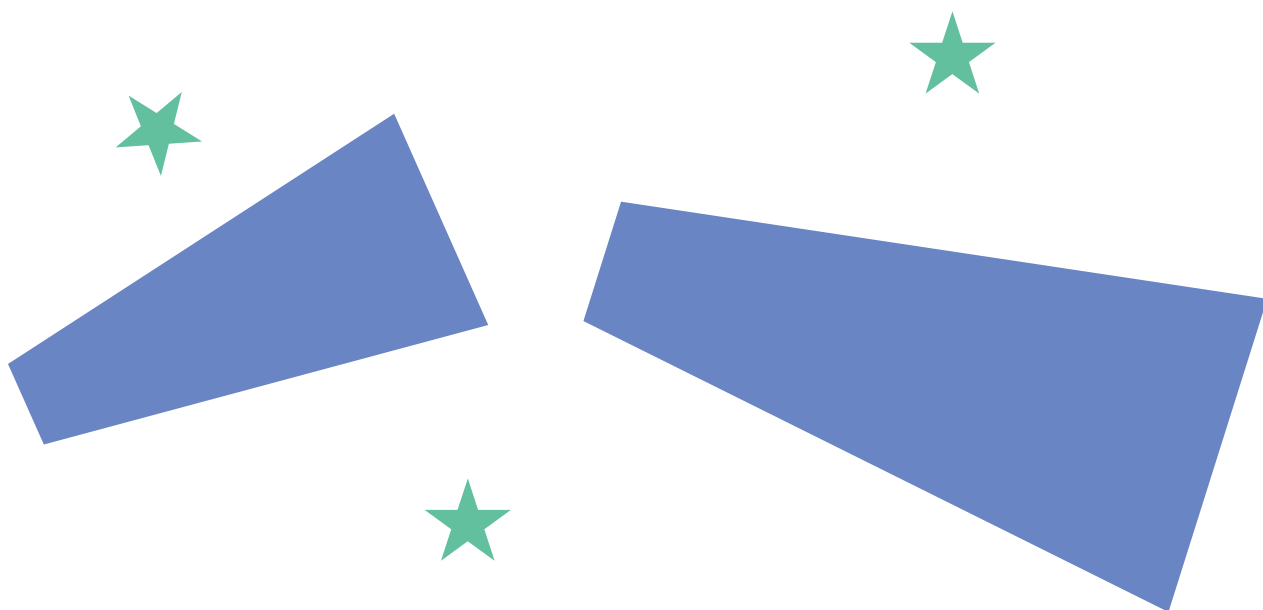
come up with supposed solutions right away. Distrust must be actively dismantled. The splits and divisions that exist among feminists aren’t just there for fun or by accident. Capitalism produces divisions every day: which school we go to, which groups we move in, which vocabulary we use, whether we experience poverty or not... That’s why there is distrust. People live in such different worlds, and the system ensures that most people can hardly leave or escape their own world at all. That is why we chose to organize a festival, not a conference. A festival is more of an exchange. Our wish is to build strong alliances in order to shift the balance of power.

*The term “international” is apt because it includes internationalism. At the same time, it’s loaded with institutional implications. Is it perhaps too soon to be talking about a Feminist International?*

I think it is important to be future-oriented, and this is why we should absolutely be talking about a Feminist International—as a movement toward something; in the making, that is.

At the same time, we are connecting to a historical movement, without which we would not be where we are today—even if the Socialist Women’s International could not meet the feminist demands I am formulating today. We have historical ground on which we can build. But we are looking for something new. What is important is that we are no longer at the very





beginning, but we are yet to arrive at a Feminist International.

*Let's come back to the strike movement. Is this a new kind of strike?*

Yes, because it brings debates over labour and the entanglement of various relations of oppression into praxis. This helps make our context immediately tangible. It's not clear at the outset what exactly a feminist strike is—where and how we work and are active, paid and unpaid. This means that the forms we give our strike are different. There are no ready-made answers. It's a collective learning process. This strike movement links social conditions to working conditions. It speaks to the person as a whole. It wasn't by chance that the issue of violence is what started everything in Argentina. The first strike in Poland was against the restriction of abortion rights. These strikes show that working conditions are very closely linked to the devaluation of people who are read as being women. The system needs devalued people who then take over the tasks assigned to them. Otherwise it will collapse. The strikes make this clear: through their thematic diversity, and the variety of reasons and formats for striking.

*This also expands the scope of the strike: it becomes much more than just a workers' struggle.*

It is a different kind of strike, but the connection is important. It is not a

matter of holding blockades against violence in order to disrupt and disturb. Strikes are an instrument of the working class. We have extended it to take unpaid care, housework, and all social conditions into account. Nevertheless, it is still an economic stoppage, so to speak, in order to highlight our exploitation and devaluation within a system; to stop that system from functioning. It is an exercise in class politics that has unleashed an enormous amount of energy.

*Are we at the beginning or in the middle?*

It varies. In Latin America the movement is moving at a different pace. The women's movement in Argentina is currently the largest, most radical and most active anti-capitalist movement. But their strength is based on decades of organizing. 70,000 women attended the 33rd national women's meeting last year. We are not yet at this level in Germany, although feminist movements have become stronger here, too. After 30 years of institutionalized feminism, we are only now getting back into action and out onto the streets. We have to dig up forgotten experiences. Until recently, only a handful of people knew that there had been a women's strike in Germany in 1994.

*We currently find ourselves in a remarkable situation: The current intensification of struggles in areas essential for survival—climate, saving the ecosystem, transformations in the world of work—and the*



*simultaneous strengthening of feminist movements are all connected. Is this true or is this merely wishful thinking?*

The connection is definitely there. It is also true that these problems didn't just pop up yesterday; in other words, they are intensifying. Women are responsible for filling the gaps ripped open by capitalism: take care work for example, which performs many tasks that are vital to the existence of societies. Right-wing forces are gaining influence in many different countries, threatening people who are not white and male. Women are at the forefront of the resistance to all of this. For example, the movement of Black women is a tremendous force in Brazil, but it is also at great risk. There is something new in this uprising, a new self-confidence, the recognition of one's own power. It is very important for us to know each other, even across national borders and continents.

*Are these struggles mostly defensive struggles?*

It is wrong to look at it that way. Sure, the fight against restrictions on the right to abortion in Poland was initially a defensive struggle. But in Argentina they are fighting for a new law. This is possible precisely because it was preceded by the strike movement against femicides, i.e. against attacks on female life. Many networks in Poland mobilized against this as well. The question is what these struggles are pushing for, what project they are part of. Much of what we observe today is also a defensive struggle waged on behalf of patriarchy against a growing feminism.

*Now let's turn to the unwieldy concept of intersectionality. Is it a fad? Is it necessary? Does it need a makeover?*

It is absolutely necessary. But it is important to remember the context in which it was created. At the end of the 1980s, Kimberlé Crenshaw imagined a street intersection where paths of power intersect. Hence the term. She described how the fact that a person can be discriminated against in several different ways can give rise to very specific forms of experiencing oppression; in other words, it is not merely an aggregation, or adding together, of different forms of discrimination. In the first instance, intersectionality poses the question of blind spots: who falls out of sight, when, and why? I don't like it when it is used to establish ever more narrowly defined

identities. When it is used in this way, the term creates divisions. We should be using it in exactly the opposite way—recognizing blind spots and taking them into consideration when formulating a common strategy. That is important; that's what moves us forward.

*Patriarchy and capitalism are often seen as two independently existing forms of oppression against women; if one disappears, it doesn't mean the other will disappear with it. This sounds logical, because we know that patriarchy is older than capitalism and that its existence has been well nourished—even under “actually existing socialism”. Nevertheless, it seems right today to think of the two terms “patriarchy” and “capitalism” together.*

This is true, and this is what I mean by a feminism that is also a feminist politics of class. All the debates about care and the “Care Revolution” reflect this. It must be a critique of the gendered allocation and devaluation of activities upon which capitalism is based, and which is thus only possible through patriarchy. But the solution obviously cannot be to simply turn all care activities into services. This is partially because they obstruct any increase in profits. Care can only be made more efficient to a limited extent. You can't simply shorten the amount of time it takes to raise a child. This often makes the services expensive and accessible only to higher earners. Some also outsource care to migrant, socially marginalized women. Class-political feminism must also take this into account. Nor is exploiting all people in full employment a solution. “Slavery to an assembly line is not a liberation from slavery to a kitchen sink”, as the Italian feminist Mariarosa Dalla Costa said.

If we consider how we want to transform conditions today, we have to be very specific when we talk about capitalism. Of course, it has also incorporated a certain amount of diversity, has made capital out of it, has shaped it for the market. This has also transformed patriarchy, even if it has not disappeared. We need a feminist critique of the economy and a class-political feminism in pace with the times, so that we don't lose our way and spread ourselves too thin.

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Translation by Hunter Bolin and Kate Davidson for Gegensatz Translation Collective





## Enormous traction

Striking is a powerful tool, as the battle for reproductive rights in the United States illustrates By Cinzia Arruzza

In the comedy *Lysistrata*, the ancient Greek comic playwright Aristophanes depicts a fictitious strike held by Athenian women looking to end the decades-long Peloponnesian War. In order to achieve their aim, they refrain from what we might today describe as sex work: they refuse to perform sexual favours for their husbands and lovers. The comedy has a happy ending: the men agree to the conditions set by the striking women, commence peace talks with the Spartans, and celebrate both the end of the strike and the end of the war.

Nearly 2,500 years later, women around the world are still striking, but today's feminist strikes are not just aimed at sex work. Aristophanes mocked Athenian warmongers by contrasting a relatively amusing war between the genders with the tragic business of the war with the Spartans. Today's feminist strikes do not wage a war between the genders: they encourage the direct or indirect involvement of men and wage a war against sexism and capitalism. And yet they have at times evoked laughter, scorn, and the same superficial, dismissive attitudes that were reserved for Aristophanes's hilarious and utopian humour more than 2,000 years ago. But feminist strikes are a serious matter.

Contrary to some misinterpretations of their scale and politics, the transnational feminist strikes—which have taken place on 8 March for the last three years in countries spanning from Argentina to Poland—neither replace labour strikes with reproductive strikes, nor do they foreground the importance of the domain of social reproduction as opposed to that of production. Feminist strikes have been made possible by the significant change to the make-up of the global workforce in the last few decades. Today, women constitute almost 40 percent of the workforce, but this quantitative increase in women's participation has also been linked to an increase in professional segregation: as a rule, women are employed at considerably higher rates than men in the ser-

vice sector and in the informal economy. Due to the increasing commercialization of social reproduction activities that employ a female or feminized labour force and the large proportion of female workers in publicly administered social reproduction sectors, a feminist strike, for the very same reason, often constitutes a traditional industrial action. In many cases, it is a strike that has a direct impact on capitalist revenues and disrupts the value creation chain.

Rather than propagating the pre-eminence of reproduction over production, feminist strikes highlight the unity between the two: the continuity between exploitation in the workplace and the profit gained from the unpaid labour performed by women in the domestic sphere; capitalist accumulation and the organization of social reproduction; the role of women in reproduction; and the division of labour within the formal and informal economy. They show us that the social relationships that organize, exploit, and discipline workers in the workplace, drain precious natural resources, and pollute our air, food, and water, are the very same that restrict our lives, our identities, interpersonal relationships, the multitude of reproductive options that are available to us, and the familial formats to which we are granted access. This is one of the reasons why—despite the hatred and criticism—feminist strikes have so much traction, have gained visibility and popularity, and are spreading all over the world. For example, on 14 June, the birth of the Swiss feminist movement was marked with a mass strike and demonstrations that drew around 400,000 people. In light of this, the USA is something of an exception. Despite the visibility of the feminist strike that took place in the USA on 8 March 2017, the women's strikes did not manage to gain the same level of traction there as they did in other countries. There are structural reasons for this—in particular, the criminal labour laws at both a state and federal level—that make it impossible to organize general, federal, and political strikes,



## Food sovereignty and feminism

People began to talk about female agriculture as early as the 1970s. The term referred to the social foundation of smallholder agricultural production: in subsistence agriculture, women often play the key roles: as workers on the fields, traders of produce at local markets, and holders of expert knowledge. As Christa Wichterich and Kalyani Menon-Sen explain, 'Where this form of production is replaced by monoculture-centred industrial cash crop production, where mechanisation and agrochemicals rule, agriculture becomes masculinised'. This is a further reason 'why many women reject being bound into development projects and transnational value chains'.

In 2013 the women's assembly at the La Via Campesina Conference in Jakarta, Indonesia, adopted the Women of Via Campesina International Manifesto. The manifesto talks of 'the world's peasant women' who are engaged in 'defending peasant agriculture, biodiversity, our natural resources'. Already back in 2007, against the backdrop of the Nyéléni Declaration, a separate Women's Declaration on Food Sovereignty had been adopted, which referred to women as those 'who throughout history have been the creators of knowledge about food and agriculture' and 'are today the principal guardians of biodiversity and agricultural seeds'.

As Wichterich and Menon-Sen highlight, unlike liberal-feminist approaches, this *feminismo campesino* y popular strives for collective land ownership instead of individual property deeds for women. The struggle of many women peasants collides with 'the everyday sexual violence that female farmers in traditional communities are subjected to'. Within La Via Campesina, a campaign against domestic violence and the sexism perpetuated by male network members was started.

According to Wichterich and Menon-Sen, an idealisation of sovereignty or a romanticising of rural subsistence farming as a traditional way of life are not at the heart of this female peasant rebellion. Rather, based on a diverse and not always progressive agenda, they aim for 'a policy of recognition and politicisation of devalued female labour'. ■

and make it extremely difficult to organize economic strikes in the workplace. And there are also political causes that are connected to the current economic situation: For example, despite an enormous degree of visibility, the Women's March failed to follow a strategy based on movement-building and mass mobilization, instead choosing to heavily involve itself in election campaign work for Democratic Party candidates.

But this situation could change in the coming months due to the current attacks on reproductive rights, especially abortion rights. Between March and April of this year, Alabama, Ohio, and Georgia introduced legislation criminalizing abortion at every stage of pregnancy. In the past few years, a number of states like Texas, Oklahoma, Mississippi, and Louisiana have passed or attempted to pass laws that either completely ban abortion, or that would make it extremely difficult to access abortion providers. It is becoming increasingly clear that these various state laws form the prelude to challenging abortion legislation at a federal level. The freedom of a woman or a pregnant person to have an abortion without excessive state intervention is currently recognized due to the landmark decision made by the US Supreme Court in 1973, known as *Roe v. Wade*. Until now, *Roe v. Wade* has served as the last means of legal recourse for preventing reactionary legislation passed at a state level from being implemented. But the new climate created by the Trump administration and the appointment of Brett Kavanaugh—a notorious anti-abortionist who in 2018 was accused of sexual assault by Christine Blaisey Ford—to the Supreme Court has paved the way for *Roe v. Wade* to be challenged at the Supreme Court level with new laws passed in March and April.

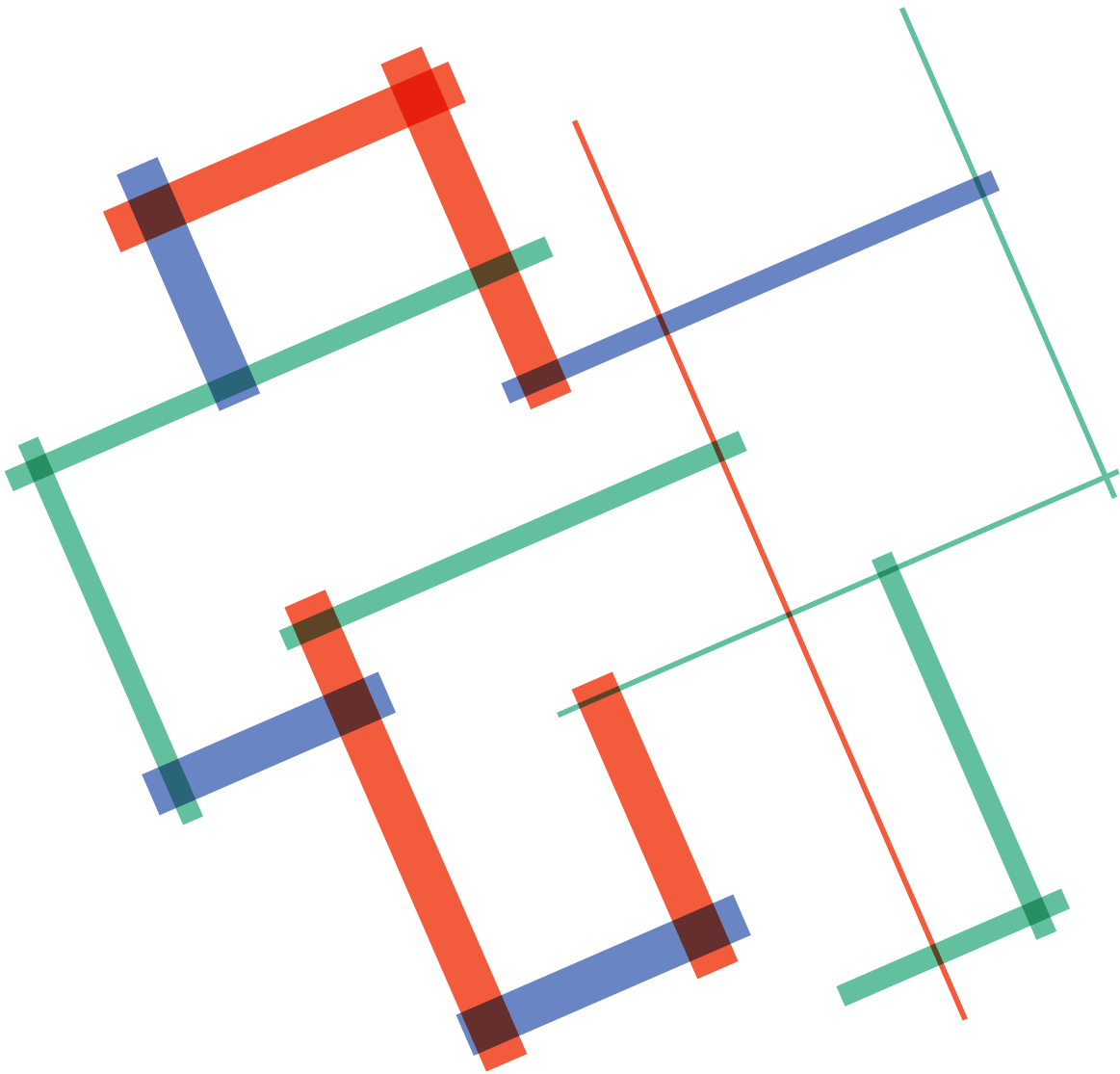
As a response to this ominous prospect, activists from the socialist feminist working groups of the Democratic Socialists of America (DSA) have formulated a proposal for a campaign for a mass strike to defend reproductive rights. The basic concept involves working towards creating a large network of trade unions, workers' centres, and feminist, anti-racist, and socialist organizations that are prepared to mobilize en masse in defence of reproductive rights, and for free and universal healthcare. One of the goals of the mass strike campaign is to create the conditions for substantial strikes in significant workplaces. However, as in feminist movements in other places, the strike is not just seen as an individual, isolated event, but rather as a process of radicalization and mobilization: one in which bridges can be built between feminist modes of organization and labour organizations, and in which the ongoing opposition between identity and class politics can finally be overcome.

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Translation by Louise Pain and Kate Davison for Gegensatz Translation Collective





# The right to say “no”

On the links between climate justice, environmental relations, and gender justice

By Christa Wichterich

Natural and climatic disasters are becoming more frequent on all continents. Whether drought or flood, earthquake or hurricane—women are hit hardest: 70 per cent of those killed in the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami were women. Out of 15 people who died in cyclones in Bangladesh, 14 were female. In photos showing victims, women and their children meld into an ensemble of vulnerability in desolate landscapes, just as they often do in depictions of poverty and war.

This is tragic, but also a stereotype that obscures women’s agency, making all women appear equally vulnerable and equally affected by gender. However, the consequences of climate change fuelled by resource and energy-intensive industrialization and the growth constraints of the capitalist system differ greatly, not only from region to region but also

socially. Besides gender, a whole complex of intersectional inequality factors such as class, skin colour and age, as well as city/country or North/South context, is responsible for determining who and where the victims of environmental destruction and climate change are. Questions of property ownership and wealth distribution as well as socio-cultural norms and ideologies play a major role here.

A key mechanism for externalizing and outsourcing the after-effects of climate change is the shifting of risks, burdens and labour onto the global South, precarious social classes, the indigenous and poor, and into future, onto coming generations. Ecological calamities hit populations already made precarious by violence, exploitation and poverty, with force. Existing inequalities, schisms and struggles over distribution are exacerbated by this.



## A shared vision: 25 years La Vía Campesina

In 1993, during a meeting of representatives of peasants and rural workers in Mons, Belgium, La Vía Campesina—the peasant way—was founded. Producers had faced the sudden globalisation of agriculture and agriculture policy, and the growing power of international corporations. ‘Peasants had to develop a shared vision,’ Vía Campesina explains: the alliance aimed to amplify the voice of peasant and rural worker organisations, an important step in the defence of their rights had been made.

Today, the peasant way comprises over 180 local and national organisations in 80+ countries. The organisation represents the interests of around 200 million people—La Vía Campesina’s identity is that of an ‘autonomous, pluralist, multicultural movement’ independent of parties and corporations. Membership fees, private donations and financial support from NGOs, foundations and government agencies allow the organisation, which sees itself as a ‘grassroots mass movement’, to continue its work. A rotating international secretariat—based in Harare, Zimbabwe, since 2013—acts as a steering group. An important element of the organisation’s identity is collective decision-making: an international conference is held every four years.

Among its members are the Brazilian landless movement (MST), the Peruvian Peasant Confederation (CCP), but also European associations such as the French Confédération paysanne or the German Arbeitsgemeinschaft bäuerliche Landwirtschaft. In 1996 a European-level coordinating body for Vía Campesina was established that sees itself as the ‘European peasant opposition’ and comprises 27 peasant organisations from 18 European countries that are fighting for ‘fundamental changes to agriculture policy at the European and global level’. ■  
*viacampesina.org, eurovia.org*

The necessary social support and preventative care work, as well as repair work in the wake of environmental crises, are outsourced by the market and the ever-thinner welfare state into the unpaid care economy traditionally left to women. In fact, as a result of climate change, work relating to nutrition, health and environmental clean-up is increasing. In view of these multiple injustices, climate activists have for years been crying ‘No climate justice without gender justice!’

As a counterpoint to the ongoing contempt for women’s agency, the central focus in the following discussion is the struggles waged by feminist organizations that address power and inequality and critically engage with a development model that, in its hunger for resources and growth, produces crisis after crisis.

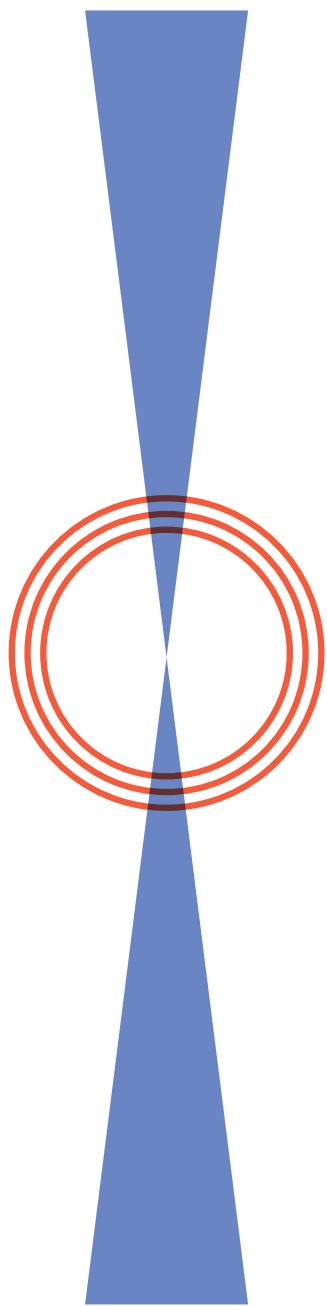
Since 2006, the group Women and Gender Constituency (WGC) has been involved in the annual international climate negotiations. The proportion of women in the negotiations is just under 40 percent, but only 2 percent of the funds for climate protection go to organizations in the South and women at the grassroots. The lobbying effort in Bonn in 2017 made use of the gender mainstreaming approach. One of its successes was the adoption of a Gender Action Plan.

It was not gender mainstreaming, but radical criticism of the development model and the trade regime that inspired 160 women’s rights organizations, mainly from the global South, to reject a statement on ‘Gender and Trade’ at the WTO Ministerial Conference in Buenos Aires. The statement promises women economic empowerment through inclusion in value chains, entrepreneurship and trade. Such ‘pink-washing’ is decried by critics who demand development and food sovereignty instead of the free trade rules that destroy their local livelihoods, with the slogan ‘Basta ya! WTO: We want sovereignty’.

At the same time, social movements are reacting locally and internationally to interwoven, systemically triggered crises. The particular quality of feminist approaches is to establish links with women’s bodies and women’s work, i.e. social reproduction and care, and to associate violence against women’s bodies with resource extractivism and the destruction of nature.

The farmers of La Vía Campesina, with their ‘feminismo campesino popular’, have for some years linked the demand for food sovereignty with, on the one hand, struggles against the violence of land grabbing, industrialization and genetic engineering in agriculture and, on the other, the fight against sexual violence and for sovereignty over their own bodies. The Latin American movement against femicide, Ni una menos, takes for granted that violence in society, including against nature, is carried out on women’s bodies. The feminist network Miradas críticas del Territorio desde el Feminismo combines defence of one’s own body with defence of the land. The body is seen as part of a larger whole in terms of the social and natural environment and territorial regions. Their fight against the depletion of nature and their bodies is part





of their radical development critique, itself a decolonization strategy.

Similarly, WoMin (Women in Mining) in Southern Africa combines resistance to mining and destructive extraction of resources through investment, with major development projects that demand the recognition of women's day-to-day care work. They resist the expropriation of their land, which—as with the Indigenous peoples of Latin America—is not only their livelihood, but also their identity, their culture: 'We cannot eat raw materials. He who takes our land takes away our identity and our lives.' This is why sovereign disposal over the land, the (re-)appropriation of common goods and the (re-)construction of identity are at the centre of their struggles.

In the recent past, more and more large investment projects are threatening locally vital resources such

as land, water and forests. China's new Silk Roads and agricultural development corridors are driving transnational infrastructure development, and large-scale technologies and market instruments such as carbon emissions trading are being offered as solutions to problems of species extinction, resource scarcity and global warming. Agriculture 4.0 is being promoted as a contribution to the green economy, because intelligent technology is supposed to save energy and raw materials, preserve biodiversity and prevent soil erosion. Drones could control plant growth, while sensors could measure soils, light irradiation and the vital data of fattening animals. At the same time, CRISPR gene editing has reached a new level of technical intervention in living organisms and their adaptation to environmental or profit needs.

The highest form of domination over nature is geo-engineering, the industrial development of large-scale technological encroachments on the atmosphere, either to extract its CO<sub>2</sub> and then store it underground or to suppress increases in temperature. Such manipulations with their technological optimism divert attention away from emission reduction. Already, technologies labelled as green are all profitable business areas. And the political rhetoric in Europe proclaims that such investments can prevent migration and combat its causes.

Because all of this happens largely above the heads of local populations, riding roughshod over the foundations of their existence, women at the grassroots insist on their right to say 'no' to these development projects that undermine the regional economies and local biospheres in which they produce, trade and consume.

While the social relations of nature in general, and environmental management in particular, are still organized according to the biblical motto of 'subdue the earth', feminist eco-concepts strive for a different approach to nature. As an antidote to eco-feminism, which has been criticized in academic circles for its assumption that women are particularly close to nature and its orientation towards a return to nature, feminist political ecology focuses instead on intersectional power and inequalities in environmental conditions. In recent battles at the grassroots level, however, anti-authoritarian and holistic ecofeminist approaches combine in saying 'no' to socio-ecological devastation and green economy technologies.

This strategy of refusal and self-organized resistance corresponds to the transnational wave of women's strikes from Argentina to Switzerland, and the 'Fridays for Future' school strikes against climate change. What these struggles have in common is that they are based primarily on the agency of women who empower themselves through civil disobedience or political strikes, and construct themselves as political subjects of socio-ecological transformation.

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Translation by Gegensatz Translation Collective



# It's about time

Climate justice is less an objective than a process: the struggle against the social structures responsible for climate injustice By Tadzio Müller

It's about time! For quite some time now—ever since the hot summer of 2018 and the drought summer of 2019, ever since the forests of northern Germany burned in spring and the River Spree began flowing backwards, ever since the remarkable defence of the “Hambi” (Hambach Forest) against the coal dinosaurs of RWE and their public fossil-fuel henchmen in the state of North Rhine-Westphalia, ever since the embarrassing failure of the federal government's coal preservation round table, disingenuously named “coal commission”, and the directly related emergence of a new, young generation of climate activists in the form of its politicized avant-garde, “Fridays for Future”—probably the whole country (with the exception of some crazy climate deniers, that is, fascist deniers of reality) has known that this thing about the climate changing... it's kind of important. Some have even grasped that rather than “climate change”, it would be better to say “climate crisis”; while the former implies a slow, linear process that might not be as dangerous, people broadly understand “crisis” as a terrible thing, as something we have to do something about. Obviously.

What this means is that, although almost a decade has passed since it was repeatedly emphasized, in the lead up to what turned out to be the spectacular failure of the COP15 climate summit in Copenhagen, that we had roughly a decade left to avert the climate crisis, it's only just now that the political system and the less climate-savvy sections of society are finally beginning to think about how we can save the climate within the next 10 to 30 years. Well done, but it would have been nice if the penny had dropped a bit earlier.

When it comes to dealing with the climate, climate protection, and all possible variations of the so-called “environment question”, especially since the environmental movement along with the Green Party split from the broader German left, the left is faced with the question of how these issues should be tackled from a left perspective. In other words, how can we move away from the widely spread misconception—sometimes even spread by our own hand—that environmental problems were bourgeois-post-materialistic-luxury-latté-problems, in order to make it clear that climate protection, which so far hasn't been a barrow that any particular political persuasion has pushed but is now very much a popular demand, is in fact an absolutely core project of the left, and that the matter of climate change—er, crisis—is a problem produced by the left's favourite old villain, capitalism, for which the only solution can be found beyond said capitalism?

Many leftists have found that the answer to this “framing” question lies in the term “climate justice”. The argument goes something like this: Sure, the climate must be protected, and the political force that

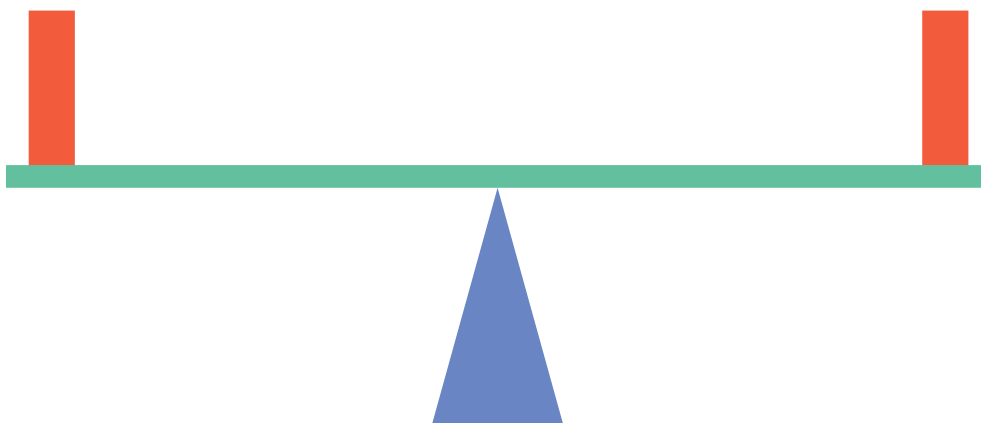
has been primarily associated with climate protection has been those awfully bourgeois-post-materialist-luxury-latté-greens; in their capital-friendly confusion, however, they will try to confront the problem with “market-based” solutions, such as emissions trading or similar ineffective rubbish; instead of banal green “climate protection”, the problem demands serious left-wing “climate justice”, which, beyond the old climate nerd scene, doesn't seem to amount to anything more than “climate justice = anti-capitalist climate protection or climate protection through the socialization of the means of production”.

Mind you, at least this term, which first entered the lexicon of a slow-but-steadily growing protest movement around the time of the first climate (and Antira) camp in 2008, has now become an important part of left-wing political discourse. Here too: Well done, but it could have happened earlier. That way, we wouldn't still today be wasting time clearing up such misconceptions, which themselves are the long-term consequence of the nowadays rather embarrassing assertion (that is, representation) of ecological topics as polar-bear-hugging luxury problems.

The most serious misconception can be seen in attempts to unite issues relating to the “Aufstehen” campaign with the hottest pink-purple-green issues du jour, and can be encountered everywhere from the gilets jaunes to deep within Die Linke. Just weeks after the gilets jaunes announced that a day of action for “climate justice and social justice” would take place on 21 September 2019, Bernd Riexinger wrote: “It is the task of Die Linke to bring social justice and climate justice together within a left-wing, future-oriented program.” This patently well-meaning statement seems to be based on the following logic: “social justice”—a bread-and-butter issue for the traditional working-class left—is, at its core, about the redistribution of wealth at the local and national levels, whereas climate justice happens at the global level. What is irritating about this is that it represents a kind of methodological nationalism that constructs the social—meaning, society—as a national phenomenon. Furthermore, and this is of central significance here, it reveals a total misapprehension of what the concept of climate justice has meant thus far, what the history of the concept is, and what the demands of the movement for climate justice today actually are. In order to counter these misconceptions, I will first address the dimension of “injustice” associated with the climate crisis (climate injustice) and then explain the genesis of the climate justice movement and the meaning of the concept itself. It's about time that we understood this.

What is climate change really about? First and foremost, it's about justice. This is because, on aver-





age, those who have contributed the least to climate change suffer the most and those who have contributed the most suffer the least. The latter usually have sufficient resources to protect themselves from the consequences of climate chaos. They have accumulated these resources, this wealth, through the very same activities that have driven climate change. This central fact, which incidentally applies to almost all so-called “environmental crises”, can perhaps best be described as climate injustice.

In order to better understand the claims and demands of the climate justice movement, it is worth taking a look at the history of social struggles, and more precisely the emergence of the environmental movement in the USA in the 1960s, which was first and foremost a movement of the white middle class for the white middle class. It originated in relatively privileged “white” neighbourhoods and cities, where its main objective was to keep these communities free from air pollution and prevent their children from being poisoned by chemical companies and power plants. As understandable as this objective was, it had an unfortunate effect: instead of these companies and plants being closed down and dismantled, they were simply relocated—from the richer communities to the poorer ones, whose residents were for the most part African Americans, Hispanics, Native Americans, and other marginalized groups. The struggles of this liberal environmental movement by no means solved the problems it criticized—instead they were simply shifted a few steps down the ladder of social power.

These communities of colour, upon which a whole host of dirty industries were suddenly imposed, were not just passive victims. Instead, they organized, accused the movement of “environmental racism”, and established their own movement for “environmental justice”. To put it in analytical terms: when seemingly environmental problems are not seen as social problems, and when awareness that a single dirty factory is in fact embedded in broader social structures of rule and exploitation is absent, then not only is the solution of those problems rendered impossible, but existing social inequalities are deepened.

As the debate about climate change gained momentum in the 1980s, there developed an idea of the cli-

mate problem as a primarily technical one, requiring solutions focused on reducing and remedying the concentration of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere through certain mechanisms. This, in turn, led to the development of so-called “market mechanisms” for combatting climate change in the 1990s. This approach—without engaging in the entire critical debate about these spectacularly ineffective environmental policy tools—was based on a technical fix that ignored social structures: every CO<sub>2</sub> particle is the same as any other, so surely it doesn’t matter who, where, and under what conditions CO<sub>2</sub> is conserved.

Economically speaking, it is best to save where it is cheapest, and it is easiest in the Global South, where everything is cheaper on average. So we could, for example, give development organizations money to protect forests from deforestation, which in turn would protect the climate while we continue to burn fossil fuels here in the Global North. However, there is a big catch to this idea: in these forests, which were suddenly earmarked for rescue from excessive deforestation, there were often Indigenous peoples, who for thousands of years have excelled in sustainable forest use and who were now being threatened with premature displacement from their traditional lands by the market mechanisms negotiated under the Kyoto Protocol in the 1990s, in a process of so-called “green grabbing”.

In the course of these negotiations, the story of environmental justice was once again taken up: in response to the “climate racism” of official climate policy, Indigenous American activist Tom Goldtooth, founder of the “Indigenous Environmental Network” with a long background in the environmental justice movement, formulated the demand for “climate justice” for the first time. This was the start of the struggle to reframe climate change as a question of human rights and justice.

The next step in the development of the climate justice narrative came with the publication of the *Greenhouse Gangsters vs. Climate Justice* report in 1999. This report focused on fossil fuel companies, where instead of individual solutions (such as ethical consumption), it proposed major structural transformation. The fight for climate justice had finally been explicitly described as a global one. The report also



## Brick by brick: the Declaration of Nyéléni

‘We, more than 500 representatives from more than 80 countries, of organizations of peasants/family farmers, artisanal fisherfolk, indigenous peoples, landless peoples, rural workers, migrants, pastoralists, forest communities, women, youth, consumers and environmental and urban movements have gathered together in the village of Nyéléni in Sélingué, Mali to strengthen a global movement for food sovereignty. We are doing this, brick by brick, as we live here in huts constructed by hand in the local tradition, and eat food that is produced and prepared by the Sélingué community. We give our collective endeavor the name “Nyéléni” as a tribute to and inspiration from a legendary Malian peasant woman who farmed and fed her peoples well.’

The Declaration of Nyéléni begins with these words. The Magna Charta of food sovereignty was adopted in February 2007 in Mali during an international forum. La Vía Campesina and eight further organisations had organised this conference, and the idea had global appeal—since then numerous further international and regional Nyéléni forums have taken place. In 2016, for example, over 500 delegates from 40 countries met in Cluj-Napoca, Romania, to discuss the development of sustainable food and agriculture systems. Since 2014, as a platform for diverse organisations, initiatives and individuals, the Nyéléni network has also been active in Germany.

The declaration describes food sovereignty as ‘the right of peoples to [...] define their own food and agriculture systems’, the needs of producers and consumers are to be the focus, not ‘markets and corporations’. Food sovereignty is regarded as ‘a strategy to resist and dismantle the current corporate trade and food regime’ and leads to ‘new social relations free of oppression and inequality between men and women, peoples, racial groups, social and economic classes and generations.’ ■  
*nyeleni.de, nyeleni.org*

formulated the movement’s most important framework to date, namely, it dismissed the market mechanisms of the Kyoto Protocol as the “wrong solutions”.

In 2002, the organizations that would later form the core of the movement met for the first time in Bali and developed the “Bali Principles of Climate Justice”. In 2004, several groups and networks that had long been working on a critique of market mechanisms, in general, and emissions trading, in particular, came together in Durban, South Africa, and founded the “Durban Group for Climate Justice”. A final breakthrough was made at the 13th climate conference in Bali in 2007. The alliance of critical organizations mentioned above provoked an open conflict with the politically more moderate “Climate Action Network”, whose schmoozy lobbying strategy had meanwhile turned out to be quite a flop. The “Climate Justice Now!” network emerged from this 2007 conflict.

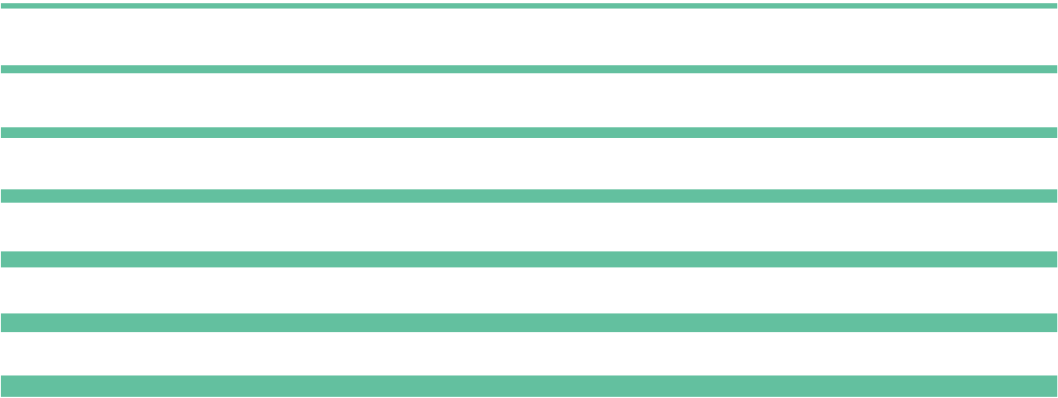
The press release announcing the establishment of this new network articulated a number of demands that still guide the climate justice movement to this day, and was later converted into a kind of founding manifesto. It demanded, first, that fossil fuels be left in the ground and investment instead focus on adequate, safe, clean and democratically-controlled renewable energies; second, that drastic reductions of wasteful over-consumption be undertaken, especially in the Global North, but also with reference to the elites of the Global South; third, that massive financial remittances take place from the Global North to the Global South based on the concept of climate debt repayment and under democratic control; fourth, that resource conservation be based on human rights, including the enforcement of Indigenous land rights and the promotion of Indigenous community control over energy, forests, land, and water; and fifth, that sustainable, smallholder farming and food sovereignty be promoted and protected. To achieve these goals, the “climate justice” movement makes use of a wide range of tools, from preparing research reports and everyday political work in communities particularly affected by climate change, to civil disobedience in the form of coal mine blockades or the militant struggles of the Ogoni in the Niger Delta.

To sum up, the climate justice movement is a descendant of the environmental justice movement. Like the latter, it originated in the Global South and focuses less on technical fixes than on the transformation of social structures. If I tried to define it, I would say climate justice is less an objective to be achieved—that is, a fair distribution of the costs of solving the climate crisis—than a process: namely the process of fighting the very social structures that cause climate injustice. If this broad definition is taken seriously, then a good deal of the struggles that currently fall under the banner of “climate justice” can actually be recognized primarily as struggles for land, water, and other basic needs, and—ultimately—for human rights.

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Translation by Kate Davison and Wanda Vrasti for  
Gegensatz Translation Collective





# “There is no deadline, only enormous urgency.”

Nadja Charaby and Tadzio Müller discuss the events that are creating new truths, climate justice, and why the left needs to take stock

*The clock is a widely used—and abused!—metaphor, and when we talk about the climate crisis it is always five to twelve. What time is it really?*

**Nadja:** For us, it’s five past twelve.

*So, you mean it’s later than we think?*

**Nadja:** The effects of climate change can be felt everywhere. But there are also different time zones.

*Climate time zones?*

**Nadja:** The climate crisis affects certain regions—those that have contributed least to climate change—much worse than others. That’s why it’s definitely five or even a quarter past twelve there, while it’s maybe five to twelve for us. But to be honest, this image has been used for so long and the climate crisis has intensified so badly that it really is already much later.

**Tadzio:** “Climate time zones” is an interesting concept because it allows for non-synchronicity. We don’t really have any visual metaphors for this yet. It also depends on what you are referring to. The idea that there is such a thing as global simultaneity, meaning that everyone has the same amount of time left, is based on the notion of a catastrophe that is identical all over the world and occurs at the same time for everyone. Right now, we are increasingly confronted with the logical conclusion of

this idea, which is to say: it’s too late anyway, there is nothing else we can do, let humankind die. In my view, this amounts to a kind of prosperity racism gift-wrapped in a slightly progressively charged, but essentially anti-humanist stance, if our impact on other animal species is anything to go by.

*You’re referring, for instance, to what the author Jonathan Franzen recently said—that we should let go of all hope?*

**Tadzio:** Exactly. It is an almost religious thought: a disaster, or apocalypse, which naturally then ends in epiphany. It’s total nonsense, because the people who got us into this mess can just go on living. It’s prepperism of the highest order. You cannot capture injustices with these kinds of alarm clock metaphors. This idea of the apocalypse, in which the climate just collapses in one sudden event, just doesn’t exist. We need new visual metaphors for an unjust, but creeping climate catastrophe.

*These now hackneyed or inaccurate images were put forward with the aim of raising awareness of what is happening, in order to say: We don’t have much time left, we must act. On the other hand, thanks to these very same images, we also live in fear. This is paralyzing.*

**Nadja:** But there is also a mobilization occurring. In the past we were afraid of





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many things that no longer exist today. It is much better, I think, if we now focus more on what has happened in recent years. An unbelievable number of people have been taking to the streets to say they won't put up with it anymore. For many people, this is linked to a demand for a different system. This is far from a state of shock-induced paralysis, but quite the opposite. It is finally breaking the paralysis. The climate crisis is at the centre of the justice crisis.

**Tadzio:** The idea that mobilization through fear doesn't work, or that fear demobilizes, is nonsense. We live in the tradition of Rosa Luxemburg, who warned that we were facing socialism or barbarism—if barbarism isn't frightening, I don't know what is. We on the left have still not understood what the climate crisis is really about. It confronts us with questions about fundamental aspects of temporality. To simply settle into a cosy resignation about our strategic irrelevance, because we think history will solve the problem for us, is wrong. The climate crisis poses a completely different question. It says: the pressure is on. It is not entirely clear when the problem will occur, but it is urgent because on this question, it doesn't get better on the other side. To say, "you mustn't mobilize on the basis of fear", is like saying, "you mustn't talk about giving up". These are psychological mechanisms that get rolled out whenever it proves undesirable to deal with the fundamental challenge the climate justice question poses likewise for left-wing strategies here in the Global North. What does it mean when we can no longer say, "Everything for everyone! Prosperity for everyone!", but instead demand redistribution from everyone—including members of the working class in the Global North?

*We could recall here the shift in the 1970s towards automation and qualification—a huge transformation—when unions said: "the robots are taking our jobs".*

**Nadja:** The climate crisis also takes jobs. The unions should always take this into account in their struggles.

*This type of message from the unions, at the time, was actually demobilizing. Frigga Haug's suggestion that the unions develop a positive scenario, a vision, worked to a small extent.*

**Tadzio:** There is no overly catastrophic story today. Climate discourse in the

Anglo-Saxon world takes worst-case scenarios much more explicitly than the German discourse, with the exception of Extinction Rebellion and a few radicals. Climate discourse in Germany is nothing but a polite talk shop; just look at the total irrelevance of the political proposals being made here today. In reality, there is no climate discourse. Who among us so-called catastrophists would have thought a few years ago that the trees in northern Europe would be burning in spring 2019? The catastrophes are here, and I'm wondering why are we still talking about catastrophism. It's irrelevant.

*Worldwide asynchronicity. The problem here is that climate policy is still fairly focused on the national level, but it needs to be global. What contribution can the concept of climate justice make here?*

**Nadja:** Historical background is key here. The people who took to the streets here—of which there were and still are many—weren't motivated by a desire to fight for international solidarity. Nor on behalf of island states that will likely soon drown. They took to the streets because their future is being destroyed and because they have felt the climate crisis first hand, especially in the past two years. The experience of this hot summer had a massively mobilizing effect. We talked, and talked, and talked, and for a long time it seemed that this was of little use. Sure, a strong anti-coal movement has formed, which is also visible internationally and which has already made a small contribution to global solidarity. This is where the debate on climate justice comes in: to make clear that the prosperity of the industrialized countries is essentially based on burning fossil fuels—and this has been the case for more than 200 years—coupled with the colonial exploitation of many countries. And those who have had the least say, in the poorer countries, now have to deal with the consequences. We must bring solidarity into the core of the debate by pointing to this historical dimension and saying that, first of all, those countries that are responsible for the crisis must reduce CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. Around 100 companies worldwide base their wealth and profits on burning fossil fuels. The global community established 30 years ago that the climate crisis cannot be regulated by nation states. Then, climate agreements were made, but the idea was still: the market will



regulate it. A few more mechanisms have been added, but there has never been a willingness to fundamentally question the economic system. Instead, the focus has been on creating market incentives for climate-friendly action. As we now know today, this leads to human rights violations elsewhere: we free up our dirty production here by shifting it to small farmers elsewhere, then reforesting the land, then privatizing the forests. **Tadzio:** Climate justice is a complex but also very useful term. What isn't climate? It is not an ecological issue, as it has been traditionally described in German discussions. The hackneyed metaphor of the clock is now accompanied by the image of the polar bear on a melting ice floe. I have nothing against polar bears, but when we say "climate justice", what we're saying is: this is about people. The term "climate justice" opens up both globality and non-synchronicity. At the same time, it makes clear that when we talk about crisis, we are not talking about the future. We have known this here, too, since 2018. Ever since Hurricane Katrina, the Americans have known that the climate crisis has also arrived in the Global North. The concept of climate justice makes clear that there is a historically created injustice. It is a global injustice, it is about power, about distribution. We want to say to the broader left and to all progressive people in this country, "Hey! We have to deal with this issue now!" And importantly, "There is no deadline, only enormous urgency." But that's not the same thing. And the type of urgency differs from that of other issues.

**Nadja:** We also have to look at the social fabric through the climate justice lens. The fight for climate justice comes from the USA when Black communities first asked why dirty industries were always dumped in the areas where they lived. This also posed a social question. The same question arises here too. As the summers get hotter, who will be able to afford air-conditioned apartments? Who will be able to live in green areas? Whose jobs are going to be killed by the climate crisis? Who will want and be able to work on a construction site when the summer temperatures become a danger to life and limb?

**Tadzio:** The question of urgency is extremely important. The hot summer of 2018 showed that the political system is incapable of finding solutions. We know that, psychologically, humans store

singular catastrophic events in a different part of the brain than ongoing or continuous processes. In this way, trauma can be avoided or controlled so that you can function. But 2018 demonstrated that everyday life is changing. That can't just be tucked away in the back of the brain somewhere. This is not just a once-off catastrophe that passes; it is different. This is why there were 25,000 people at a climate academy in Cologne for the COP in November 2017. And then, in September 2019, there were 1.5 million at "Fridays for Future"! The younger generation is no longer just going along with things; they are incredibly bullshit-resistant. They know something has to happen now.

*When we talk about justice, we need an argument that makes clear that this is no longer a matter of: "I would like my life to be as good as yours. I want to have your standard of living and prosperity." People don't aim downwards, but in the opposite direction. We need to make it clear that justice cannot be achieved if the current focus on "growth" persists.*

**Nadja:** What's the gain? That I work 60 hours a week, take out a mortgage, and drive a car? That means we actually have to talk about where we want to go. We need degrowth—work less, consume less. If everyone wanted to live like we do right now, we would need more than one planet. This resource consumption is not sustainable for everyone. At the same time, Germans are not the happiest population in the world. But I don't want to take an individualistic perspective either. But yes, the discussion about where we actually want to go has not yet been sufficiently led. This is the discussion we should be leading, because we can't just tell our Filipino friends that they should all start eating vegetarian now.

**Tadzio:** There are basically two evaluation criteria. One of them I would describe pejoratively as methodological nationalism, by which I mean that it foregrounds national benchmarks. This is not at all a dumb idea, because redistribution has primarily taken place within a national framework, within the framework of the welfare state, which was once one of the left's central projects for justice. Unfortunately, we on the left only have one way of creating justice at the moment: redistribution within the national framework. This of course requires externalization: we export



Photo: Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung

**Tadzio Müller** is senior advisor for climate justice and international politics. Nadja and Tadzio spoke with Kathrin Gerlof and Tom Strohschneider.



injustice elsewhere. And this—our main tool—no longer works in the context of climate crisis. We have to switch to radical globalism. We have to develop universal standards of justice. That includes redistribution from the richest among us to the poorer.

*Does that mean there has to be a discussion about how material wealth is distributed from the Global North to the Global South?*

**Tadzio:** Yes. We have to talk about this. If there are no measures for financial redistribution, the Global South will not be able to commence climate protection.

**Nadja:** However, this does not contradict the fact that there must also be a redistribution from top to bottom.

**Tadzio:** We have to tackle both: national redistribution—from top to bottom—and global. And if you take a look at who is excluded from prosperity, you end up with almost everyone, both in this country and on a global scale. What that means for a project of transformation on a societal level is still very difficult to envision. That's why I'm so excited about the young generation.

*Is this new generation more willing to redistribute, share, and think globally?*

**Tadzio:** I don't think they are revolutionary, but they think globally because it sounds absurd to them to think that the crisis could be solved at the national level. The younger generation is a social protagonist that enables a forward-looking perspective. This is because the solutions of the past are not solutions at all. The pivotal mass protagonist is this generation.

*A generation as a revolutionary subject, instead of a class, so to speak. The broader left has been gathering around the class paradigm for more than 100 years now. Will that change?*

**Tadzio:** I'm intellectually doing to the young generation what Marx did to the industrial proletariat. I'm investing a real group of people with a historical, philosophical expectation and saying: now do it! But yes, the climate crisis needs a completely new paradigm for historical actors. Here we must look to the example of 1968: that was not a global class revolt, but a global generational one. To view the whole thing as a class project produces an incredible amount of intellectual confusion; viewing it instead as a generational project at least opens up potential for a

future that we do not just pluck from our imagination, but is rooted in the lived reality of a new historical actor.

*When you use the term "generation", are you talking about a specific age cohort, or rather an attitude?*

**Tadzio:** There are events that create new truths, and many people will join such a project. But the leadership of this project lies with the younger generation.

**Nadja:** A younger generation is currently propelling an older generation. This is good. But then there are many others who have been fighting for decades, and a dialogue should be established between them and the newer generation. This already exists. Often people look disparagingly at new protagonists. We don't. We work together respectfully.

**Tadzio:** We've been fighting for ten years; a few thousand of us are still on the streets. The younger generation has four million people. That is a massive bargaining chip. The unions now say they have a climate position. Why? Because of the younger generation, not because of four years of "Ende Gelände"! I call that magical realism. They're out on the streets and everyone is trying to dance to their tune. And they are open to a vision of justice.

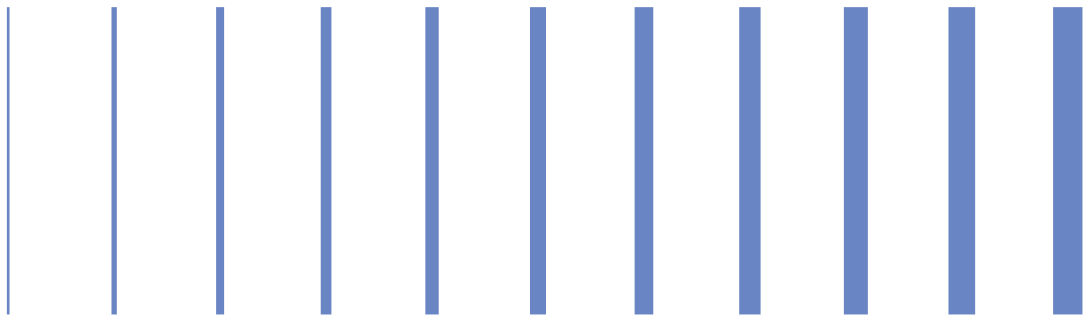
*So we're talking about a politics that is system-conquering and system-transcending?*

**Tadzio:** Yes, but the term "democratic socialism" is really unsexy. When we say "democratic socialism", people hear "national welfare state". To them, these words don't seem to express what is needed to achieve a just world. What matters is what is heard. Socialism comes from the time of the big factories; it is a political and economic project that is no longer as relevant today as it was when the world was organized in big factories. **Nadja:** I actually do like socialism, but it has to be greener. The term "climate justice" has a more transformative scope, and above all it is consistently internationalist. It also works with a feminist agenda. But I actually think it is important to impress upon democratic socialists that the most natural conduit for democratic socialism is climate justice. In that sense, I haven't abandoned the concept.

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Translation by Kate Davison and Wanda Vrsti for Gegensatz Translation Collective





# The bitter reality

So far, too little attention has been paid to how the climate crisis is already bringing about migration and displacement worldwide By Nadja Charaby

The reports of the past few weeks could not be more contradictory. The “Sophia” naval mission, which saved around 50,000 people between 2015 and 2019, has been definitively buried by the European Union. In its place, the EU is now relying on border security in Libya and a barely enforceable arms embargo, while the rescue of thousands of refugees from drowning has been left to private, volunteer sea rescue services.

At the same time, the UN Human Rights Committee ruled at the end of January 2020 that the international community would not be able to deny to people affected by climate change the right of asylum in the future. And yet this global community, itself partly engendered by the almost total absence of an international climate policy, stands idly by while East Africa is beset by a massive plague of locusts that has probably not yet reached its peak. One contributing factor to the locust plague has been the rising temperatures in the Indian Ocean resulting from climate change and the extreme rainfall associated with this. The risk of renewed famine is increasing, which in turn raises the risk of conflict, displacement, and migration in a region that is already massively affected by climate change. In the past year alone, for example, around one million people fled due to natural disasters in Ethiopia and Somalia. Of the 17.2 million people displaced within their home country due to natural disasters and extreme weather events in 2018, the Philippines, China, and India jointly hold the unenviable record with almost ten million displaced people.

Yet it is no longer just the poor regions of the world where climate crisis and displacement go hand in hand. In the United States, 1.2 million people had to leave their homes in 2018 due to natural disasters, making it the country with the fourth highest rate globally. The massive destruction caused by the bushfires in Australia is hopefully still in the forefront of our minds. Numerous towns and regions also had to be evacuated there. Even if not every storm is directly attributable to climate change, extreme weather events of this sort have become more frequent in recent decades on account of global warming and the devastating scale of their effects is growing. In turn,

the climate crisis is exacerbating existing social injustices. The livelihoods of entire regions are now being destroyed. Many people are falling into the poverty trap. Their chances of ever escaping the crisis are disappearing. So far, far too little attention has been paid to the fact that the climate crisis is already leading to migration and displacement worldwide. This is not a future scenario, but an already bitter reality.

When we point out the connections between climate crisis and migration, critical voices often try to argue that the reasons cannot be clearly pinpointed. Certainly, in many cases there are several reasons, such as drought, hunger, and military conflict. It can never be a question of whether one factor causing people to seek refuge is more important than the other. Instead, the focus must be on how the global community will ensure that the human rights of those affected are protected. In the coming decades, millions or even billions of people will be forced to migrate as a result of the climate crisis, many times more in the Global South than in the Global North. Most affected are those who have contributed the least to climate change. The industrialized nations, including the EU, watch on with institutionalized indifference—the failure to put in place a climate policy is evidence of this. The demand for the reliable protection of the rights of affected countries, regions, communities, and individuals constitutes one of the core demands of climate justice.

Despite a growing scientific grasp on the interfaces between the climate crisis and migration, it remains a challenge to determine exactly who is having to flee their homes as a direct result of climate consequences. For this reason, the data on future global developments differ widely. The current figures predicting how many people will have to migrate in 2050 due to climate crises range between 25 million to 1 billion. Most of them will move within their own countries; very few will be able to flee to Europe or the United States. Awareness of these figures is crucial for the development of international or national policy approaches.

From the perspective of those affected, the most important thing is to protect their rights. Yet so far



## Emergency hotlines and critical border monitoring

In October 2013, over 260 people drowned just off the Italian coast: the Lampedusa disaster drew attention to the plight and fatalities of migrants trying to cross the Mediterranean. For days, the Italian and Maltese coastguards had fought over who was responsible for the stranded ship and the migrants on board—until it was too late.

One year later, the emergency hotline initiative was established, a project run by volunteers from Europe, Tunisia and Morocco. Their aim was to save refugees by manning a hotline for people in distress at sea. Volunteers with previous experience in initiatives such as Welcome2Europe, Afrique-Europe-Interact, borderline-europe, No Borders Morocco and Watch the Med organise the hotline that is funded through donations. This internationalist initiative fills a gap created by government policies. In many cases, refugee distress calls have been ignored by coastguards, maritime co-operations established by governments, such as Frontex, are focused mainly on preventing migration, and the entire border regime aims to deter further refugees. This has turned the Mediterranean into a death zone for people in distress.

Laura Maikowski, one of the founders, explained that the organisers wanted to find ‘some way of intervening’. Migrants who made the journey across the Mediterranean to Europe helped develop the hotline. As Watch the Med emphasises, ‘Our criticism of the border regime is directed in particular at those politically responsible in the EU’.

Internationalist grassroots activism has also become established along the Balkan route, where refugees make their way to Europe under the most challenging conditions. Projects such as bordermonitoring.eu, which was founded in 2011 in Munich, combine academic research, civic activism and critical public awareness raising. The borderviolence.eu project has documented attacks on refugees and illegal push-backs since 2016. The Moving Europe Bus provides refugees with mobile phone charging stations, internet and information for safe travel. And these are but a few examples. ■

*alarmphone.org, bordermonitoring.eu, borderviolence.eu, moving-europe.org*

there have been too few concrete approaches and measures, despite the relationship between the climate crisis and migration having become part of several multilateral processes, such as the “Global Compact for Migration” or the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change. The pioneer ruling by the Human Rights Committee this January clearly states that the right to asylum cannot be denied if people fear for their lives because of climate change. However, there is currently no legally binding convention that protects the rights of climate migrants internationally. An international convention would in any case probably not have helped the numerous internal migrants.

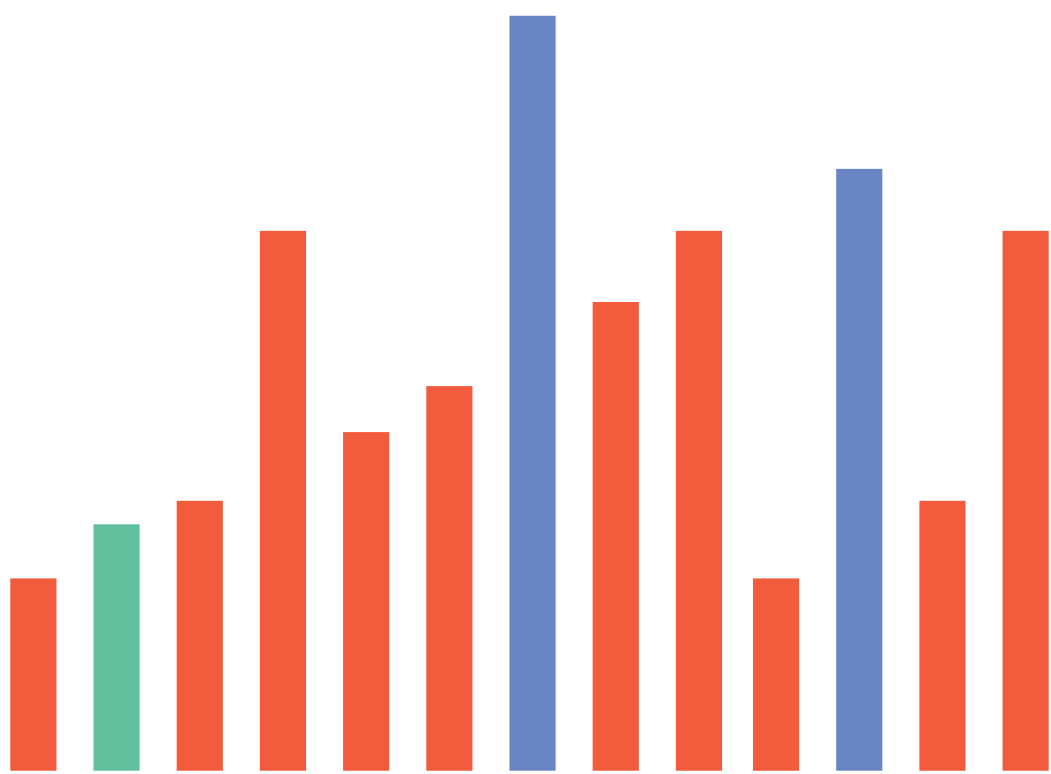
Those affected rightly demand that those responsible for the climate crisis—industrialized countries and fossil fuel companies—pay compensation for the consequences and assume responsibility. In addition to the demand for a “right to freedom of movement”, there is also a demand for a “right to migration with dignity”. This is what is being demanded by the state of Kiribati, which is at risk of total submersion. The residents of Tuvalu, by contrast, are demanding a “right to stay”. Those responsible for the climate crisis must therefore ensure that local populations are not forced to leave their homes. Of central importance is the provision of additional funds for countries from and in which people are displaced or have to be resettled due to climate change. The development of social security systems in countries affected by the climate crisis is becoming even more important, as is the introduction of disaster warning systems and technology transfers.

And what if adaptation to climate change is no longer possible and an entire state, as feared in the case of some Pacific islands, is under threat of disappearing due to climate change? Like the Nansen passports created to give stateless people access to a new nationality after the First World War, climate passports could offer a possible solution here. In this case, it must be the task of industrialized countries to issue appropriate passports: those who caused the situation must be the ones to pay for it.

Even if these ideas sound technocratic, or less enticing than demonstrating for the phasing-out of coal (which remains important), it is crucial that we here in Germany continue to exert political and public pressure on the federal government to move in this direction. As leftists especially, we must also make clear exactly what we mean when we demand that the causes of migration be tackled systematically. It is crucial that we combat the climate crisis at the place where it was generated—namely, at home. And if, subsequent to this, we want to explore all manner of larger transformational models, such as the Green New Deal, then we have to conceive of them internationally, in the interests of climate justice, to ensure that we don’t simply externalize the social and ecological costs of that transformation by dumping them—once again—on the Global South.

Translation by Kate Davison and Wanda Vrasti for Gegensatz Translation Collective





# Not capital’s “plan”

Open borders and labour market competition: Observations on solidarity and the global economy By Michael Wendl

In the debate over the consequences of flight and immigration for destination countries, labour migration is pointed out to lie in the interests of capital or businesses. Given that capital needs labour, this statement is self-evident, but it is not a convincing argument for limiting or even preventing migration. Even the occasional assertion that immigration is engineered by capital or politicians is based on the misconception that all actors intend for immigration to have positive effects. This draws upon the neoclassical conceptualization of actors as benefit-maximizing individuals acting on the basis of complete information.

Generally speaking, the impetus to flee or migrate originates from refugees and migrants themselves, their actions spurred by a multitude of factors that lead or force them to flee or migrate.

It is evident that various factions within the business community are politically and ideologically in support of migration because they are looking to acquire similarly qualified labour power at a reduced cost. Nonetheless, migration is not a strategic “plan” enacted by capital. Although capitalists make decisions according to economic self-interest, their decisions are also shaped by political attitudes and sets of

values that can be described as predominantly cosmopolitan. On the left, these values are referred to as internationalist or socialist internationalism.

Before the emergence of capitalism and the formation of a global market, flight, expulsion, and migration were the consequence of political and religious oppression or famine. The advent of colonialism sparked the systematic opening up of the world economy and the violent subjugation of additional labour forces through the slave trade, in which European and Arab trading companies advanced violent forms of forced labour migration. Even today, destitution and ethnic, religious, or political persecution remain frequent causes of flight or migration.

The historical development and implementation of capitalist relations of production have significantly increased economic migration. As analyzed by Marx, the fifteenth to the seventeenth century saw the “expropriation of the peasantry from their land”—that is, the separation of small farmers from their means of production and its subsequent expropriation. This “primitive accumulation” resulted in enormous levels of urban migration into cities where capitalist relations of production were already in place.



With the opening up of the world market to the capitalist mode of production, labour migration increased through the movement of formally free people and the ongoing slave trade. At the same time, major migration processes also occurred within capitalist societies, caused by the gradual erosion of agricultural and non-capitalist modes of production. The establishment of the “doubly free wage labourer” (Marx) marks the point at which the economic and legal preconditions for the expansion and internationalisation of capitalist societies were met. Labour mobility is a necessary component of this dynamic and of the opposition between capital and labour. This led to an increase in the already existing competition within the labour market. It was with the implementation of national social security systems and the beginning of labour market regulation (in Germany in the early 1880s) that labour migration from abroad became a national political problem, articulated first in questioning the scope of national social security systems, which would later be expanded into various national variants of the welfare state.

The idea that the nation state can protect domestic workers from immigration within an essentially borderless international capitalist system is naive. The very same nation state, for instance, seeks to improve the opportunities for exploitation available to national capital by removing national trade barriers. As early as the eighteenth century, during the age of mercantilism, attempts were already being made to support the exporting capacities of national companies.

This illustrates the contradictory effects of migration: export-driven societies create and reinforce migration processes by “exporting” unemployment and intensifying deindustrialization in importing countries. The relative job security of the core workforce in the German export industry is also based on the insecurity of employees in other European regions and worldwide. The comparatively low German wages end up putting pressure on the domestic market, especially on service sector wages, due to the effectively low demand they engender. The strong wage repression experienced on the German labour market depends largely on factors other than labour immigration, however; namely, the politically planned weakening of the protective function of labour legislation and the legal deregulation of labour markets.

On the other hand, some sections of the workforce—those that reap the economic benefits of German trade mercantilism—expect the state to prevent immigration produced by deindustrialization and to protect the domestic workforce from the national consequences of a misguided export strategy or beggar-thy-neighbour policy. But the German model of trade mercantilism can only work with open borders for goods and labour. Policymakers largely ignore that this results in political and economic obligations to support socially integrated migration.

Contrary to the thesis of an international, quasi-uniform capitalism, we instead find ourselves with a system of national value creation. This takes place

within spaces that are defined by nation states but are nonetheless integrated into the world economy via unregulated or poorly regulated trade and international value chains.

Notions of fencing off domestic labour markets are incompatible with an international economy. Nor can migration be seen as a major cause of wage repression, labour market deregulation, and the decommodification of labour power. Migration also has different consequences for the development of various sections of the labour market.

Empirical studies about the effects of labour migration on different market segments show that it does have an impact on the sub-market for lower-skilled labour (in the two lowest income brackets), where it generates additional wage pressure and displacement into unemployment, even if these effects are relatively small. The more strongly the labour market is regulated, the smaller these effects are. Examples of such research can be found in a special issue of the journal *Wirtschaftsdienst* from 2014 on the question of how migrants are integrated into the labour market, and in a recent study by the Institute for Employment Research (IAB) on the labour market prospects of refugees.

Acceptance of open borders thus depends on preconditions like the political regulation of labour markets so that established labour law norms and collective bargaining agreements cannot be undermined.

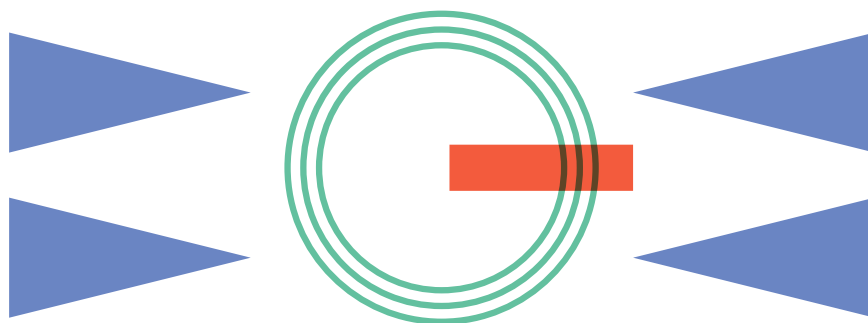
The fact that since 2012 German trade unions have managed to return to a productivity-oriented collective bargaining policy, and in some cases even exceeded the combined redistributive scope of productivity and inflation shows that despite an increase in labour migration, collective bargaining policy in Germany has changed course to overcome the wage repression instituted prior to the 2008–09 crisis.

This shows also that the correct strategy is one that focuses on increasing the legal minimum wage and abolishing or restricting various forms of precarious employment. In principle, the need for stronger political regulation also applies to housing markets and the construction of new housing.

It is a fallacy to assume that displacement and migration only benefit capital. On the one hand, immigration is necessary in view of the demographic change of ageing societies. Furthermore, from a left-wing perspective, it is also a matter of practicing solidarity with people forced to migrate and flee their countries of origin, not least because of Germany’s foreign trade policy of ruthless mercantilism enacted at the expense of other societies.

For societies that are becoming more international, it is important to have value systems that recognize how immigration contributes to cultural enrichment and makes societies more diverse—and thus more worth living in. The practice of mutual solidarity and empathy for those in need not only holds societies together, it makes them more humane.





## Standard: Being human

Fundamental rights are universal and indivisible. As more and more people seek refuge, “welcome” initiatives, solidarity cities, and sea rescue missions show what this means By Kathrin Gerlof

Is a new internationalism even conceivable without unconditional recognition of the right to migration and without the active support of all those people and groups who give and risk so much to defend this right?

As Friedrich Engels put it in 1847, “big industry has brought all the people of the Earth into contact with each other, has merged all local markets into one world market, has spread civilization and progress everywhere and has thus ensured that whatever happens in civilized countries will have repercussions in all other countries.” This very interdependence leads to two basic responses: either denying interdependency, which permits shirking responsibility and taking an “everyone for themselves” approach; or acknowledging interdependency, whereby one’s own well-being can be measured against the well-being of others while bearing in mind that one’s own well-being is often based on the misery of others.

A new internationalism would have to be measured by its acceptance, or not, of all people seeking refuge—irrespective of the extent to which this was met with approval and recognition in one’s own country or political environment. Such an internationalism would not judge whether the decision to flee is “justified” or “unjustified”, since this would indicate a lack of will to grant fundamental rights to all.

The concept of apportioned fundamental rights is an oxymoron; the first part is mutually exclusive with the latter part. Just as it was once recognized that workers’ struggles are always justified in a system that links wage labour to exploitation, today it should be possible to see that capitalism creates many reasons for migration, from social misery to environmental destruction to political persecution, all of which demands a right to migration. If this right is recognized as universal, it will at last enable a discussion of how solidarity and internationalism can be practised.

We are currently witnessing the outsourcing of protection and assistance for refugees to private enterprises and organizations, to citizens and volunteer initiatives, and to cities and municipalities that do not want to comply with the exclusion policies of nation

states. These forms of internationalism are neither state-oriented nor state-controlled, as in the past, but constitute a kind of individual commitment that still has a political effect.

What are we talking about? Around 69 million people worldwide are currently fleeing their homes. 40 million are seeking refuge in their own countries, 25.4 million are registered as refugees, and 3.1 million are asylum seekers. 85 percent of them find protection in developing countries. The countries that have accepted the most refugees are Turkey (3.5 million), Uganda (1.4 million), Pakistan (1.4 million), and Lebanon (1 million). The EU has a population of almost 512 million, of which 0.00084 percent are refugees. Europe is characterized by two things: a lack of internationalism, and a rich variety of solidarity initiatives providing immediate relief and aid.

On one side, we see barbed-wire fences or the EU border protection agency Frontex, plans for so-called “controlled centres”, where decisions on persons seeking protection are to be made within 72 hours, “disposal” agreements with countries such as Turkey and Libya, and support for the Libyan coast guard, who are de facto being trained to deny assistance to people in emergency situations at sea and to build detention centres outside Europe.

These days, discussion around open borders can seem obsolete in the EU. But open borders do not exist, at least not for refugees. Precisely this debate paralyses the left to a large extent. There is often a lack of progressive vision concerning the role of migration and its associated struggles, a vision in which the concept of society no longer remains linked to the nation state alone, but rather fashions its yardstick from universal dimensions: humanity, or the state of being human.

This brings us to the other side, and its many “welcome” initiatives: since the so-called “refugee crisis”, which in reality is a crisis of official migration policy, thousands of people have tried to fill the gaps left by state agencies and political impotence, to say nothing of the other burdens that are deliberately imposed



on refugees. Welcome initiatives have mainly taken place in cities; not only have they demonstrated practical solidarity, but their actions are also indicative of the crisis in social infrastructure.

It is well known that many leftists on the ground have helped establish and continue to work on these initiatives. Yet in the early stages, many on the left were also quick to criticize some volunteers' excessively "paternalistic relationship" towards refugees. "The question for left-wing politics is to what extent these welcome initiatives aim to create functioning infrastructures for refugees that go beyond support for this specific group", says Mira Wallis of the Berlin Institute for Empirical Integration and Migration Research.

The question then arises: to what extent are volunteer initiatives being expected to provide such services, rather than it being the responsibility of public authorities? The fact that migration will not disappear requires new forms of solidarity that point beyond the national and even European levels, yet do not rely on the goodwill of the state. This remains a challenge for the left, however it defines itself.

The problems start even before that, however, since Europe's closed-door policy has turned the Mediterranean Sea into a graveyard for people fleeing across it. In response, civilian sea rescue missions have been making their way to the Mediterranean to rescue refugees since the beginning of 2015. In 2017, only 40 percent of rescue operations there were carried out by NGOs such as Sea-Watch, Médecins Sans Frontières, Jugend Rettet or SOS Méditerranée. They have been, and continue to be subject to massive pressure from governments and the EU, and they are criminalized or prevented from saving lives by the Libyan coast guard.

The "Citizens' Asylum" in Berlin is another practical example of international solidarity—people hide asylum seekers threatened with deportation and try to buy time to prevent it. Currently, there are about 12,000 asylum seekers in Berlin who are required to leave the country. In accordance with the Dublin Regulation, many of them will be deported to the place where they entered the European mainland. At a time when no reliable protections for asylum rights can be enforced through parliament—on the contrary, every reform serves to further restrict those rights—we must now ask how we can support those who counter this legal crisis by "breaking the law".

Why not organize runaway houses for fugitives or a kind of "Rote Hilfe" (Red Aid) for people in deportation custody? Or why not turn entire municipalities into shelters? Cities experimenting with left-wing migration policies could create a paradigm shift—and a response to the crisis of the political left—because they challenge the "national" paradigm "from within and from below, and in doing so make migration visible as a force for comprehensive social transformation", in the words of Mario Neumann, a political scientist active in the "Welcome United" network.

This idea was launched in Toronto a good ten years ago, and the transition from a "Sanctuary City" to a city of solidarity is fluid: while the former ensures de-

facto that no one is deported, the latter is about creating a city for everyone. This means networking, creating spaces, and expanding opportunities.

Berlin's "red-red-green" government—made up of the Social Democratic Party, Die Linke, and the German Greens—has also recently joined the network of "Solidarity Cities", though you wouldn't know it based on the way the Ausländerbehörde (foreigners' registration office) operates. Once again, this shows the limits faced by states when their policies are at odds with those of the federal government. Yet Solidarity Cities is "not an activist network", according to Stefanie Kron and Henrik Lebuhr in a study conducted for the Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung, but rather a symbolic roundtable between the municipal governments of European metropolises."

By contrast, an alternative network with almost the same name, "Solidarity City", is more of a grassroots initiative, founded in 2017 by refugee councils, migrant organizations, welcome initiatives, church groups, researchers, and left-wing movements. Anchored in cities like Berlin, Bern, Cologne, and Zurich, this alliance goes "much further than the official European city network", according to Kron and Lebuhr: "It is concerned with stopping deportations and taking refugees in, and beyond that, a fundamental democratization of urban life."

In this way, refugee policies are linked to social issues, as elucidated in a paper by activists in Bremen: "The principle of a Solidarity City is to detach the right to social participation from citizenship and residence status as defined by law, and to anchor it instead in belonging to the community of a city and in a process of political negotiation from below." This calls to mind the protest for solidarity held in Berlin on 13 October 2018, in which around 150,000 people took part. Under the slogan "#indivisible", this demonstration was a small miracle—such a large demonstration, in Germany of all places, and in support of refugees, at a time when the newspapers are full of reports about a right-wing shift and racist exclusion.

The "#indivisible" demonstration was an important signal: we are many. The coalition of organizers and initiators was broad, and represented not only people who follow the commandment to "love thy neighbour", but also those more inclined to call it "solidarity", and for whom a new internationalism seems not just necessary but overdue. The driving forces behind this revolt against nationalism and the erosion of solidarity were not the old-established forms of organization—parties, trade unions—but rather those parts of civil society for whom solidarity across national borders is a touchstone of a modern social contract. This is where the new internationalism lives.

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**Wenke Christoph** and **Stefanie Kron** (eds), *Solidarische Städte in Europa. Urbane Politik zwischen Charity und Citizenship*, Berlin: Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung, 2019. More information at: <http://rosalux.de/publikationen>. Translation by Hunter Bolin and Kate Davidson for Gegensatz Translation Collective



## “We shouldn’t kid ourselves”

Wolfram Schaffar on authoritarian developments, the crisis of democracy, and the connection between critical analysis and political change

*maldekstra: So far, your academic work has focused on countries in Southeast Asia like Thailand and Myanmar or China, and you’ve also taught for a long time as a professor in Austria. Looking at the countries mentioned, we’re already at the heart of the issue: there are more or less clearly authoritarian developments occurring in each of them.*

**Wolfram Schaffar:** That’s right, although the differences can’t be ignored. But to stick to the example of Thailand: in 1997, people there were still euphoric when the “people’s constitution” came into effect. Since then, we have witnessed an authoritarian regime in Thailand for which—with all due caution—the term “fascism” is appropriate. These days, when I meet former colleagues from there in exile, for example in Paris, it also takes on a personal dimension that affects me deeply. After two or three years in exile, people are often broken.

*Authoritarianism, nationalism, post-democracy, the erosion of democracy, de-liberalization—an abundance of terms is used worldwide to describe the mounting political crises. Which do you lean towards in your analysis?*

There is no term that is entirely analytically accurate. The situation we are talking about here is one marked by a variety of developments. If you wanted to do justice to these differences in an analytical way, you’d have to use a whole basket of categories to try to grapple with the crisis of democracy that we are witnessing everywhere. But this leads to a situation that is politically paralyzing, because you encounter statements like “the world is complex”. This poses a problem for critical thinking, which should also make it possible to change the situation.

*What was it like in the 1920s and 1930s?*

At that time, terms like “Bonapartism” and “fascism” were coined in order to describe authoritarian dynamics. But it had been 60 or 70 years since Louis Bonaparte’s regime, and “fascist” was a term of self-description used by Italian right-wing combat units, the Fasci di Combattimento. What appears to us today

to be well-defined analytical categories go back to anachronistic and clumsy concepts that people struggled with at the time to describe a radicalization that resisted subsumption under the available conceptions of predictable political development.

*So they were political rather than analytical terms.*

Back then, categories like “fascism” served to make an unexpected turn in world history comprehensible, and at the same time to mobilize counter-forces. If you apply this to today, then it is also more a matter of coining a term that enables political action, a term that is suitable for mobilization and strategy.

*The political action you are talking about has at least one point of reference: it should prevent something from being put in danger, from disappearing, from diminishing. In our case that something is democracy, but here too the question arises: what concept do we have of democracy, and what concept do others have of it?*

In the context of the Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung, the critical debate regarding democracy plays an important role. Colleagues like Alex Demirović, Mario Candeias, Fritz Burschel, Sonja Buckel, and David Salomon have presented highly nuanced analyses of democracy: as a form of bourgeois rule that owes its existence to the implementation of capitalism but is not merely a capitalist system of governance. Under capitalism, democracy is the only form in which it is possible to reconcile interests both within and between classes. The question is: against the backdrop of this critique, how can we go beyond a (neo-) liberal form of democracy without losing sight of the progressive potential, the forms we have achieved of a liberal system that accepts human rights?

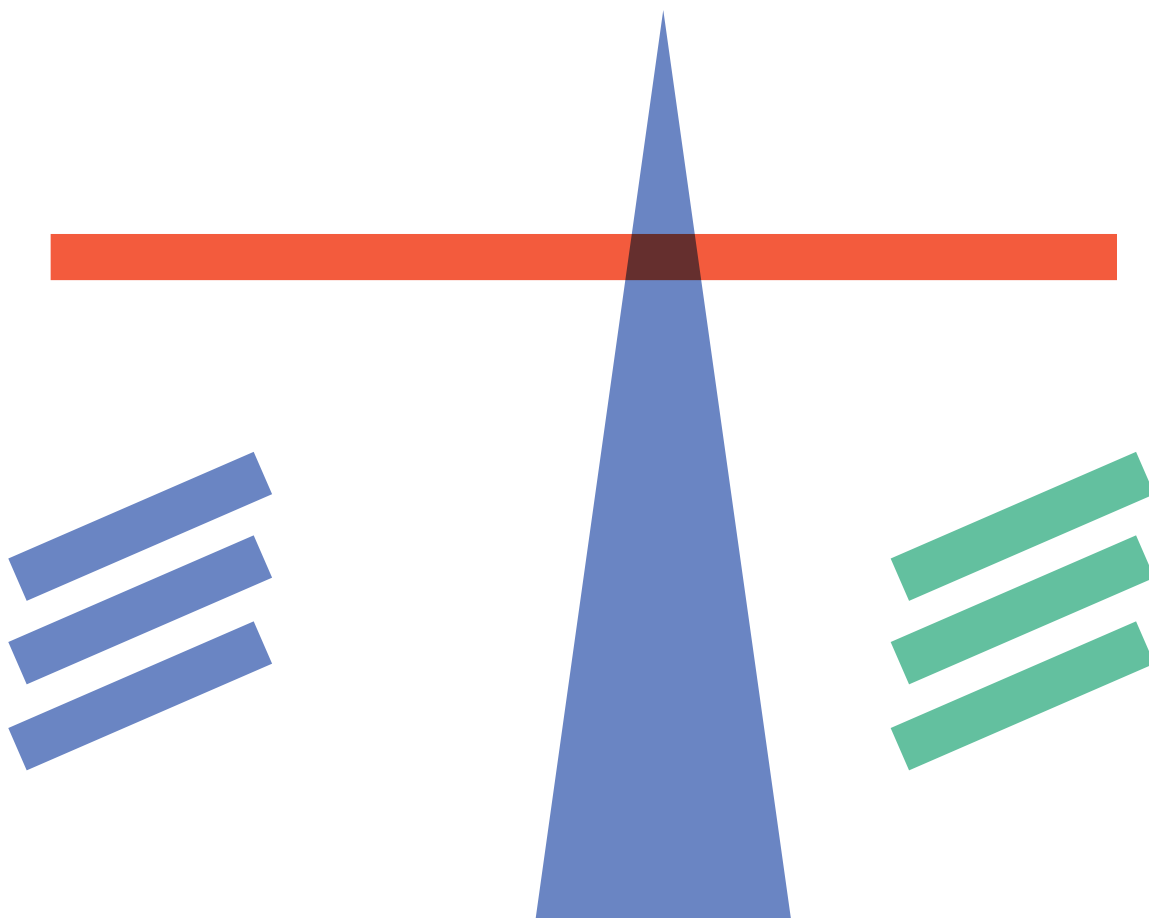
*Each of us has two fronts, so to speak.*

Yes. On the one hand, the criticism of actually existing democracy still stands: democracy does not live up to its own claim, and that has something to do with the economic conditions to which it owes its existence. The erosion of



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democracy begins at the moment of its implementation, just as Johannes Agnoli described in the 1960s in *The Transformation of Democracy*. There is an inscribed tendency for democracy to solidify itself into a merely formal, liberal-looking system. But at the same time, it would be wrong to say that this is why we do not need democracy. That would be the other front. When you defend democracy against those who are undermining it, you can't do so uncritically. But at the same time, you can't wish for it to be dismantled, either.

*Colin Crouch, who coined the term "post-democracy", paints an almost entirely hopeless picture: we are at the end of a development that he describes as a curve—from the beginnings of democracy in antiquity to the zenith of its development, the "moment of democracy" in the period after the Second World War, to the present day where post-democracy sits at the other end of the parabola.*

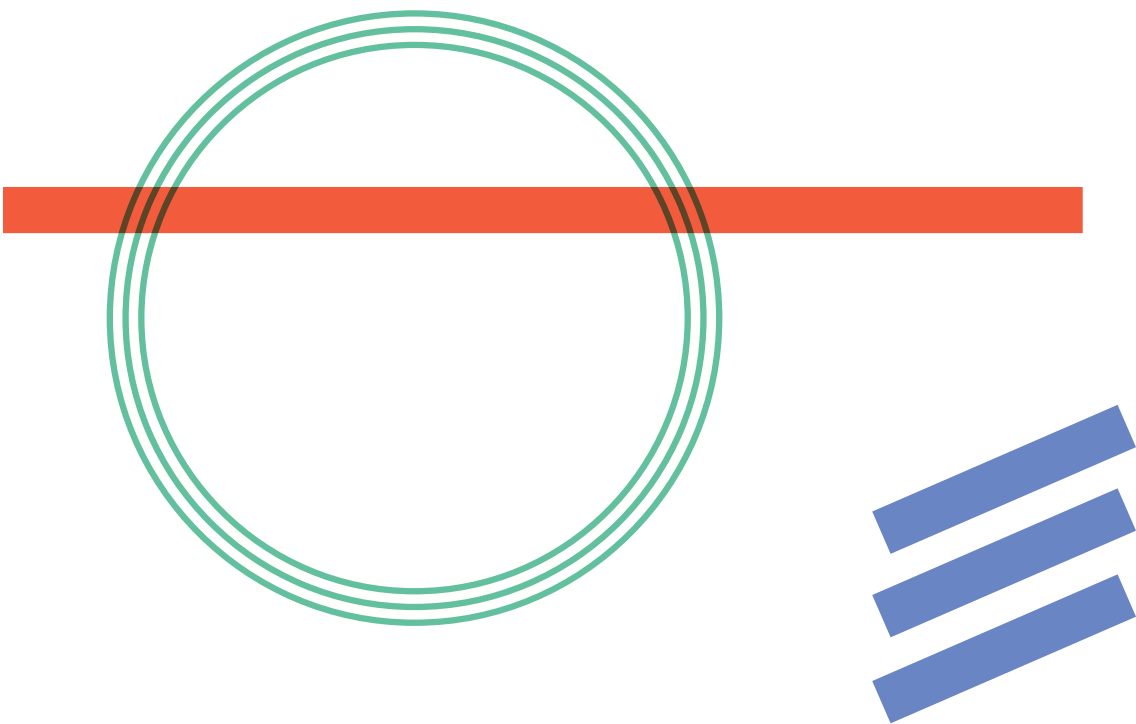
I do not share the view that the idea of the parabola suggests the end of a

development. If we had already reached the end of the line with democracy, we would no longer have to talk about saving, developing, or reinforcing it. It makes more sense to me, as Demirović has suggested, to assume a cyclical development in which moments of crisis or renewal are intertwined with political economy. This renewal must take place over and over again so that a new cycle of accumulation can begin at all. It is in this cycle that democracy will experience a new stage of development that will once again form the combat arena between the classes, the preconditions for compromises.

*But isn't there a danger here of an overly deterministic outlook; one that considers that a capitalist crisis will inevitably lead to crisis of democracy?*

No, that would also be a deficient way of understanding the connection. Democracy is not automatically dismantled when an economic crisis arises. The context is more complex and contradictory. Under capitalism, the expansion of





democracy responds to the necessity of finding compromises between divergent interest groups and social classes. This purpose may be served by a parliament, for example, but only if the interests of the people are plausibly represented there. But if the people successfully organize themselves and actually insist on their right to be asked, to have a say, it can quickly become dangerous for the ruling classes; after all, the people form the majority and can demand to be involved in a more tangible way. But this also leads to counter-movements that—time and again, but not inevitably—rely on authoritarian solutions. Of course, in periods of economic growth generous compromises can also be made from the side of capital, which we saw during the era of Fordism. But conversely, there is also no automatic mechanism that dictates that things become more democratic when things improve economically.

*Democracy is also always a question of the movements that have taken up the cause of*

*its implementation and expansion. It appears to me that this is lost in the idea of Crouch's parabola. There have always been pushes towards democratization, often independent of situations of economic crisis.*

Yes, that's true. For example, in Thailand, where people are imprisoned for 15 years or more for merely criticizing those in power, or simply "disappear", a music video entitled "Rap Against Dictatorship" appeared at the height of the oppression. It spread rapidly through social media and caught the military government by surprise, like the sound of a new round of democratization. Looking back, many newspapers have called 2019 the year of protests, with massive demonstrations in Chile, Hong Kong, Lebanon, Iraq, Algeria and Sudan—to name but the largest. Unlike the wave of protests between 2008 and 2011, however, no acute economic crisis is the trigger. In Chile, for example, the demonstrators have repeatedly been accused of asking the question of the system because of a minimal fare



increase. In Hong Kong, too, it was not an economic crisis but a legislative initiative to extradite them to China that triggered the protests. Explanations that only focus on economic factors fall short here. People clearly also strive for freedom in a rather idealistic form; the need not to be brutalized and, as Michel Foucault put it, “not to be governed in such a way” also speaks to something quite uneconomic. The fact that many critical analyses fail to systematically deal with this question definitely also has something to do with the fact that the concept of freedom is occupied “by the other side”.

*Johannes Agnoli, whom we have already mentioned, spoke of the “involution” of democracy, which is characterized “not by a desire to assert itself against the old constitutional norms and forms, but by its attempt to try to make use of them”. This sounds very much like today’s patterns: today, authoritarians come to power through elections, “democratically”, so to speak. They appear less often in the guise of military dictatorships or otherwise deviant regimes. What does this say about the way things might go?*

This description probably applies more to the world of the OECD than to the Global South. But I would also be wary of generalizing this in Europe and of thinking that a relapse into barbarism, like we saw in the 1930s, is impossible. It is trite to say that history does not repeat itself. But if historical development is open in principle, we shouldn’t disregard the possibility of authoritarian regimes becoming radicalized, leading to excesses of the worst kind, such as we cannot conceive of today. We think that humanity has learned—that humanity had to learn—from Auschwitz. But what if that isn’t the case? Otto Bauer and August Thalheimer, who were already writing about fascism in the 1920s—that is, before it had really started gaining traction—had one central concern: They wanted to warn people of the dangers of failing to take seriously the developments and the leaders in Italy and Germany, who had likely seemed ridiculous at first. We should keep this in mind when we look at Donald Trump and think, it can’t be true that this caricature of a politician was elected at all and should still remain in office. But we should always ask ourselves the question: What if there is something underpinning this phenomenon that we don’t yet understand?

*Do you have an answer?*

I have to return to Colin Crouch here, because his notion of the parabola of democracy also raises this question: is it possible that we are at a point where our previous assumptions about potential futures no longer apply because the preconditions from which developments arise have radically shifted? What is the significance of China’s rise with its new mode of capitalist development? What does the spread of the internet and social media mean for democratic states? What does it mean when we think about the planetary crisis that is affecting our ecology, climate, and resources, which imposes limits on economic growth and thus also on the possibility of achieving social integration by way of redistribution? Perhaps we don’t yet fully comprehend this epochal situation.

*What characterizes the new?*

We are dealing on the one hand with authoritarian neoliberalism, which continues to advance, especially at the EU level. Economic rules and a policy of austerity are codified in legal agreements by governing bodies with little democratic legitimacy, and in cases of doubt, such as in Greece, they are enforced through authoritarian means, even if this means going against the express will of the people. However, this European constitutionalism is legitimized by, among other things, the fact that civil rights and liberties and anti-discrimination directives are established at the same time. On the other hand, we are seeing populist movements, like those in Hungary and Poland, gaining approval by verbally opposing the consequences of this neoliberalism. However, this goes hand in hand with right-wing, nationalistic, exclusionary ideologies which, for example, criticize the anti-discrimination principles guaranteed by Europe.

*When it comes to authoritarian developments, these days China and Russia are usually the first to be mentioned. There is a lot of truth in this, but it might also be the result of a new dispute over global hegemony. Is a new confrontation between geopolitical blocs emerging?*

I’ll get straight to the point with this by asking, who would make up the democratic bloc? The USA and Europe have styled themselves as the defenders of democracy for a long time, but that has always been criticized, and rightly so.



In approaching an analysis, one ought to take a closer look. If you do, you'll see that we're dealing with a number of varieties of authoritarianism. They take different forms, but there is, however, also a dialogue between them. Since March, the European Union has officially described China as a systemic rival, and of course there are huge differences between the authoritarian constitutionalism of the EU and China. But the logic of the Social Credit System, which is currently being introduced in China and which subjects citizens to an almost totalitarian digital evaluation that rewards good conduct and punishes deviations, can also be seen elsewhere: for example, when a person's credit rating is reviewed using non-transparent methods and algorithms, when consumer's digital behaviour is intruded upon, or when mass video surveillance makes every person out to be a potential threat. China is really not that far away. We would only need to take a few small steps. We should keep that in mind.

*What role does technological development play for authoritarian regimes today?*

A big one. You can go through this with every country in which this development is currently taking place. The consolidation of authoritarian regimes is made possible via the internet: influencing elections and modifying knowledge, for example by using "alternative facts", control and surveillance, mobilization and emotionalization, manipulating media to systematically produce public spheres that match the needs of domination, and so on.

*This is also remarkable because only a few years ago we regarded the internet as a major tool of democratization.*

That's right, but we should be wary of following a "liberal" reading that considers the internet to be an intrinsically good and democracy-promoting entity that is now being manipulated and occupied by evil, state-run, authoritarian actors. Rather, we should take a closer look. Which elements that authoritarian actors are now using for themselves are already implicit in the political economy of the internet, for example? Some internet trolls are simply workers struggling with precarious working conditions, for whom posting "fake news" is a source of income because they can get high numbers of subscribers on

their YouTube channel or their site and generate advertising revenue via Google AdSense. This will not be sorted out by banning agitators, but by democratically controlling such platforms and submitting them to social regulation.

*In Europe, it is evident that authoritarian dynamics tend to arise more frequently in post-socialist countries. Is this an authoritarian echo of the past? Or does it have something to do with the transformation process that follows the failure of authoritarian socialism?*

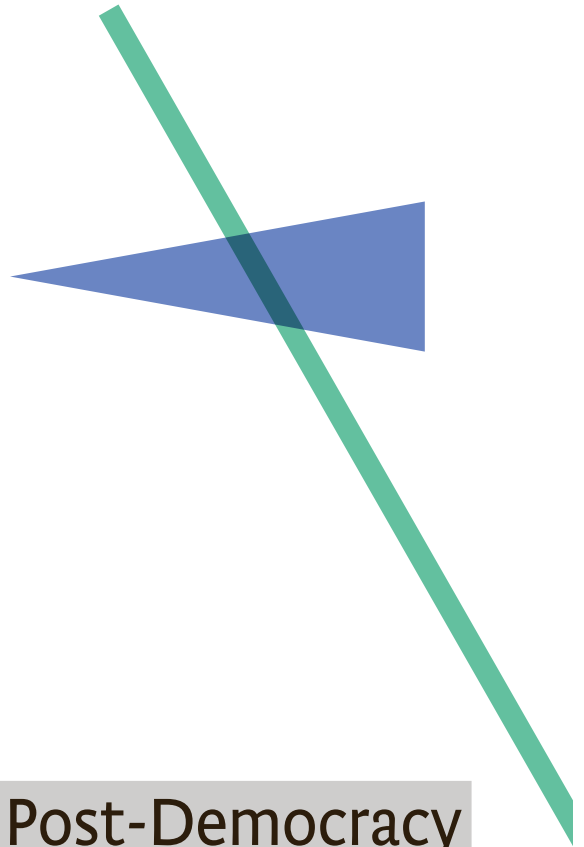
There is something culturalist in the talk of an authoritarian echo, a defamatory line of thinking: "They are not as good at democracy as we are, because they never really familiarized themselves with it."

This is also often said of societies outside of Europe, but people are quick to forget that Germany, for example, was pretty much the last candidate for forming a functioning democracy after 1945. But one was nevertheless established in the form of the Federal Republic of Germany, and with a very visionary constitution. This was not made possible by the democratic attitude of the people—on the contrary, it was a world-historical combination of circumstances that made democratization possible. When applied to post-socialist countries, this draws attention to the apparently inferior starting conditions for the necessary democratic compromises. Above all, the economic shock therapy of the 1990s proved to be a completely misguided policy.

*Authoritarianism, nationalism, post-democracy, the erosion of democracy, de-liberalization, fascism... What would you advise the progressive forces do in the current situation?*

If push comes to shove, the democratic institutions that currently exist must be defended. This requires soberly assessing which short-term strategic alliances have to be forged. It's a difficult balance. We shouldn't kid ourselves and should be prepared to consider negative, pessimistic scenarios. But at the same time, we shouldn't allow ourselves to become paralyzed, because it appears to me that the urge to lead a good life and to not allow ourselves to be incapacitated and controlled is universal.





## From Bonapartism to Post-Democracy

Marx and Luxemburg, Gramsci and Crouch: a brief history of crisis debates on the Left

By Tom Strohschneider

The answer to the question of what shape democracy is in depends on at least two additional questions: what is meant by “democracy” and what does it have to do with capitalism?

The topic has fuelled left-wing debates for over 150 years, and in doing so continued to refer back to earlier attempts at explanation. Micha Brumlik, for example, sees Donald Trump as a kind of revenant Louis Bonaparte, referring back to the critique Karl Marx formulated in *The Eighteenth Brumaire* in 1852. Herbert Marcuse later spoke of an “exemplary analysis of plebiscitary dictatorship”. “Bonapartism”, sometimes known as “democratic Ceaserism”, is characterized by the bourgeoisie as “ruling class” dispensing with immediate rule or political representation in favour of an authoritarian rule that it supports.

The current rightward drift is also often embodied by leader figures who pursue an anti-democratic restructuring of the state on the basis of democratic legitimization through elections, and in doing so invoke an alleged “will of the people” and its claim to sole representation. The project is often tied to social-sounding slogans, the problem with which however is not only their nationalist, ethnocentric or racist exclusionary logic, but also that they in truth do not touch the private acquisition of socially produced wealth.

Marx’s writings raised the question of the dialectic between democracy and capitalism—a question that did not become obsolete with the assertion of par-

liamentary-democratic systems. On the contrary: to what extent are social and political rule drifting apart, and what does that mean for the Left’s position vis-à-vis bourgeois law and parliamentarism?

In the 1930s Jewish legal expert Hermann Heller saw in this “division of political and economic command” the point of departure for the “state of tension characteristic of the current situation of capitalist democracy”. The Marxist legal theoretician Franz Neumann pointed to the role of the working class as it emancipates itself, increasingly able to leverage its interests in parliament and leading “the bourgeoisie to abandon its belief in the rule of law”, as Sonja Buckel puts it in an overview worth reading.

August Thalheimer also analysed fascism with reference to Marx’s Bonapartism theory, and came to the conclusion to defend bourgeois democracy as “the best terrain of struggle for socialism” against its destruction. Rosa Luxemburg had argued several years prior not to view parliamentary struggles as the central axis of political life, and aimed for the overcoming of “bourgeois democracy”. Wolfgang Abendroth later put forward a different argument, pushing for a social democracy that would overcome the division of the “political and economic command”.

These deliberations were quite popular after World War II, but in principle the old model of capital valorisation persisted. State intervention was deployed to counter new economic crises, but this did not reduce the crises of legitimization.



Jürgen Habermas and Claus Offe took this as their point of departure and attempted to show that the administrative system “had grown sufficiently autonomous vis-à-vis the limiting will formation”, so that the question of legitimation was posed anew: in place of participation a diffuse mass loyalty emerged, which brought forth a passive citizen whose de-politicization was fuelled by “system-conforming compensation”—that is to say, consumption, careers, free time, etc. were offered in return.

The work of Antonio Gramsci also acquired a growing role in the debates, arguing that the normal form of democratic institutions begins to crumble when bourgeois hegemony grows unstable—states of exception in this sense represent answers to crises of hegemony. Nicos Poulantzas and Bob Jessop also dealt with these crises. Where an authoritarian statism is brought into position as a reaction, on the one hand “state power” is strengthened “at the expense of liberal representative democracy”, argued Jessop, while on the other the ability to secure this bourgeois hegemony is additionally weakened.

In more recent times left-wing debates have revolved around, among others, Colin Crouch’s term “post-democracy”, which views democratic procedures as hollowed out, a mere spectacle, behind which technocratic elites exercise real power. The dominance of the economic imperative has also been discussed by Wolfgang Streeck. Lukas Oberndorfer pointed out the character of decisions during the financial crisis—austerity rules, fiscal pacts, the de facto disempowerment of the Greek government—as disabling elements of formal democracy.

A linear or even inevitable development of de-democratization is not, however, a given. People have continuously defended themselves against authoritarian conditions, for social democracy and personal freedom—and succeeded. “Capitalism appears to be separating itself from democracy”, it reads in an edited volume by Alex Demirović. One answer to the threats against democracy remains current: the search for new, deepened forms of participation and self-determination.

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**Sonja Buckel**, “Dialektik von Kapitalismus und Demokratie heute”, *Perspektiven sozialer Demokratie in der Postdemokratie, Staat – Souveränität – Nation*, edited by **Oliver Eberl** und **David Salomon**, Wiesbaden; Springer, 2017

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Translation by Loren Balhorn





# Against “Male Rage”

Around the world, women are at the forefront of resistance to authoritarian regimes

By Svenja Glaser

March 2019: In Istanbul, thousands of women take to the streets dressed in purple. “We have a huge number of demands, because so many of our rights threaten to be taken away from us”, one demonstrator says. She is primarily here because of the violence being perpetrated against women, including murders, assaults, and rapes. The police shut down the protest. Women’s marches also took place in Turkey in November 2018 despite the fact that such demonstrations are forbidden. “I have the feeling that these marches are what unites us”, says feminist film-maker Güliz Sağlam. “We have to say ‘We exist; women exist’.” These protests are a form of resistance against the patriarchal and authoritarian Erdoğan regime, which sociologist Feryal Saygılıgil says has widened the gulf between men and women.

January 2019: In Washington and many other US cities, tens of thousands of women take to the streets in protest against Donald Trump. The third annual “Women’s March” is a symbol of two years of resistance against the Republican president. Women have plenty of reasons to oppose Trump, not least of all the fact that he was able to have right-wing hardliner Brett Kavanaugh appointed to the Supreme Court. Kavanaugh is an ultra-conservative abortion opponent whom numerous women have accused of sexual assault and coercion. Trump made fun of the accusers and offered a twisted inversion of the reality of sexism by remarking that it was a “very scary time for young men in America” and that “women are doing great”.

March 2018: In Warsaw, 200,000 women take to the streets to oppose planned restrictions on the right to abortion. It’s not just that a new law would make already restrictive legislation worse and further undermine the ability of women to exercise control over their own bodies. The protests are also a response to the right-wing government in Poland that Polish Women’s Strike organizer Marta Lempart has labelled a veritable “festival of hatred and contempt for women”. In 2016, on “Black Monday”, women successfully demonstrated against an attempt to outlaw abortion, a protest that became symbolic of progressive resistance to the authoritarian government.

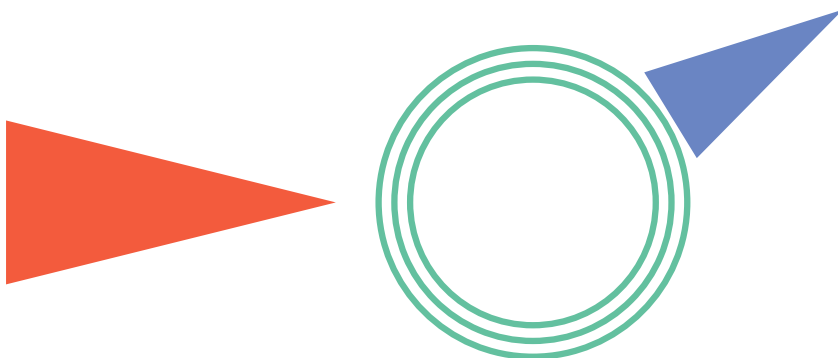
These are just three examples among many; in countries where governments are resorting to authoritarian measures, it is often primarily women who are at the forefront of resistance efforts—and with good reason. The authoritarian wave sweeping the world draws a good portion of its power from a mixture of anti-feminism and “male rage”, as Gideon Rachman puts it. Right-wing forces are whipping up anxiety over the dismantling of traditional gender roles, along with fears of loss of power and status for men that that entails. “This fear is visible in the misogynist tone of populist movements in the US, Brazil, the Philippines, Italy, and elsewhere,” Rachman writes. Furthermore, the aggressive rhetoric used by authoritarians against equality-driven policies also points to economic concerns. The feminist rebellion thus targets both the symptoms of and structural reasons for authoritarianism.

Feminist protests adorn recent years like a colourful string of pearls. The global debates around sexual harassment that have been raging since 2017 sparked by the #MeToo hashtag are just as much a part of this as actions opposing unequal pay or male violence. Meriem Strupler from Swiss paper *Wochenzeitung* has therefore urged an optimistic view be taken with respect to the present wave of antifeminist sentiment: “Different forms of oppression can hardly be combated in isolation. Modern-day authoritarianism has many faces—so must our resistance.”

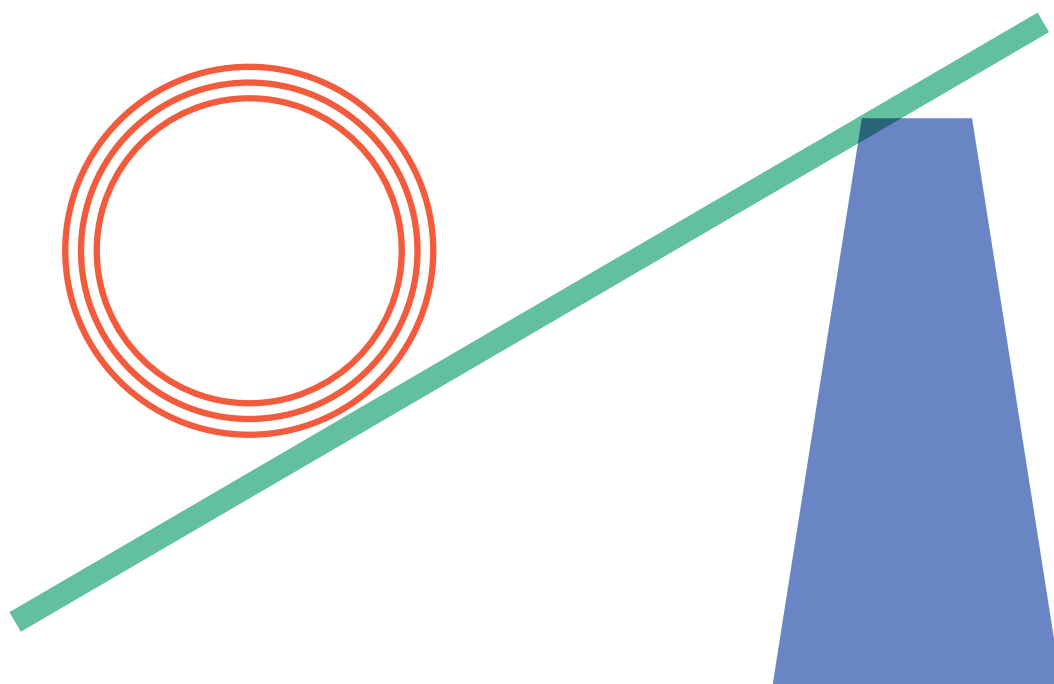
Dorit Riethmüller from the Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung takes a similar perspective. In a report from the First International Feminist Summer School, which took place in Belgrade in autumn 2018, she speaks of the need for new strategies that “support the struggle against right-wing authoritarianism and the excesses of neoliberal capitalism, strategies that empower women and treat men as equals. We need strategies that expose the old white man for what he is: old.”

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Translation by Ryan Eysers and Kate Davison for  
Gegensatz Translation Collective







## Overcoming old ways of thinking

Eva Wuchold in conversation about direct and structural violence, Johan Galtung's contribution to conflict resolution, and the concept of "positive peace"

*maldekstra: If someone asked you whether peace reigns in Germany today, what would your answer be?*

**Eva Wuchold:** We can no doubt talk of there being peace in the form of the absence of war, or the absence of organised military violence. But this would be a negative understanding of peace. We can much less talk of peace in the form of an internal social peace, and this has been so since long before the upturn of right-wing parties in Germany and Europe. Not to mention German military interventions and arms exports, the countless deaths at Europe's external borders, or the grave consequences of climate change accelerated by the German automotive industry—all a direct result of German policies.

*You speak of "negative peace"—what would "positive" peace look like?*

Unlike in the case of negative peace, which is premised on the absence of direct violence, we can only talk of positive peace when it coincides with the absence of structural violence.

*It is a concept that can be traced back to Johan Galtung.*

Precisely—the Norwegian scholar who is regarded as the founding father of peace and conflict studies. By negative peace he understands the encroachment upon fundamental human needs, the causes of which are structural, that is grounded in values, norms, institutions or power relations, but also entirely avoidable. Or, to put it more generally: it is the discrepancy between that which is—the actual—and the potential—that which could be.

*That is a very broad framework.*

Yes, it includes all forms of discrimination and exploitation, the unequal distribution of income, education opportunities, life expectancy, also as a result of environmental pollution and wealth gaps of any kind, and the obstruction of any struggle for emancipation. At the foundation of Galtung's theory are systemic factors that are independent of social actors. By contrast, positive peace in Galtung's view is not only to be distinguished from negative peace, understood as the absence of organised collective violence, but also from the traditional understanding of peace as a synonym for stability and





Foto: privat

**Eva Wuchold**, born in 1973, is a political scientist whose work focuses on peace and conflict studies as well as environmental politics. She has worked as a project consultant for several NGOs in the fields of civil peace service and development cooperation. Today she heads the Department of Global Issues and Special Funds at the Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung where she advises on a number of issues, including positive peace.

balance or a term for “law and order” that reflects a predictable social order. Positive peace thus operates as a synonym for “all other good things in the world community”, which, in this context, more than anything means the cooperation between and integration of groups of people rather than the absence of violence.

*But does that not in the end boil down to just another way of describing the structural conditions of violence, another left-wing, materialist critique of society?* Galtung does indeed understand positive peace as a dynamic process in the sense that it is meant to bring about more just socioeconomic and political relations. And in his model of a post-revolutionary society, Galtung also tries to outline a counter-perspective in which the costs of structural violence are minimised. But in doing so, he considers aspects that go well beyond the clash between capitalism and socialism.

*Can you explain this further?*

What characterises Galtung’s model is the idea that society, on the one hand, seeks the personal fulfilment of its individual members, encouraging individualism and individual freedom, and, on the other, it sees the individual not just as an object of social order but also as its measure. If we assume that society is not just made by but also for individuals, then, according to Galtung, the values of a society also have meaning for the individual. Accordingly, his understanding of individualism demands the opportunity for all to exercise their freedom—even for non-conformists. His work sets out a structure which grounds solidarity in freedom and which is undergirded by the components of autonomy, participation and cooperation. He goes on to identify the deep phenomena, deep structure and deep culture which operate on all of us but which remain hidden. Galtung argues that a structure prescribes certain modes of behaviour in people, which then establish themselves because people act in a particular way without questioning why. Or do not act for similar reasons.

*So we are talking about contradictions that are not always visible on the surface?*

You could put it like that. Galtung is not just a sociologist and a political scientist—he is also a mathematician. He has developed all of his arguments using the

analysis and scientific evaluation of these contradictions. This is how he arrived at his definition of positive peace—by calculating the sum of relative consensual values in the world community using a list of ten values, namely: 1. The presence of cooperation, 2. Freedom from fear, 3. Freedom from want, 4. Economic growth and development, 5. Absence of exploitation, 6. Equality, 7. Justice, 8. Freedom of action, 9. Pluralism, 10. Dynamism. These are highly complex analyses, not simply a subjective position.

*How did you come across Galtung’s work?*

I have experienced first-hand what violence means during periods spent abroad, such as in Ambon in Indonesia, where in 1996 there was civil unrest between the Madurese and the Dayaks, in Palestine during the Intifada of 2000, or in Mexico in 1998 and in Brazil in 2002. At the same time, I also observed for myself how scarcely German foreign, cultural and developmental policy wants or is able to respond to it. That is why I chose to pursue a degree in peace studies at the European Peace University in Stadtschlaing once I had finished studying in Germany. There we learned how to analyse conflicts and violence in all their facets—always using concrete case studies. More than anything, though, we learned what is needed to maintain peace and what this even means. Johan Galtung was one of the teachers there.

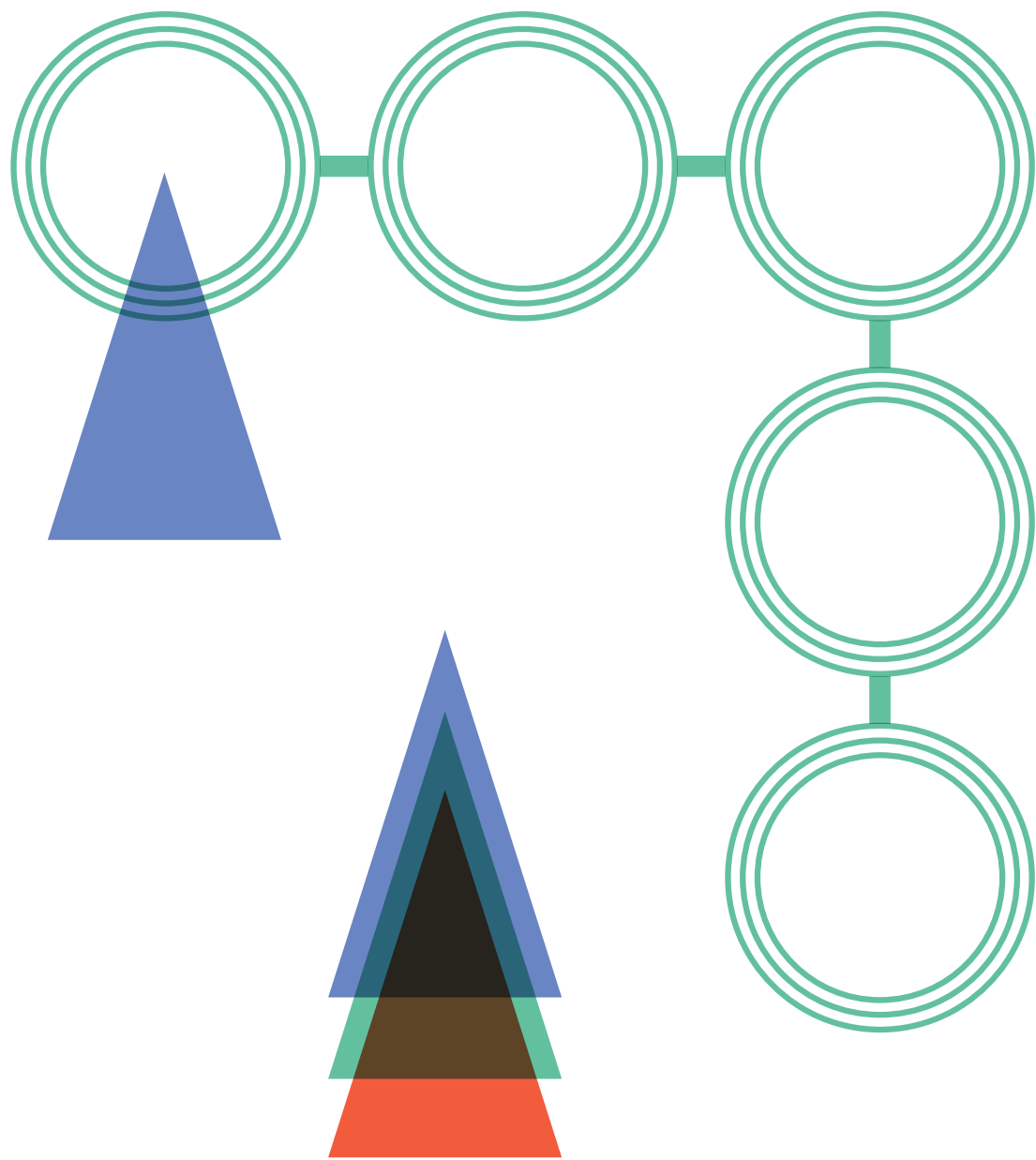
*How did you find him as a person?*

I saw Galtung first and foremost as a free spirit. His credo with respect to all conflicts that he helped us analyse was “to think out of the box”, so to think creatively beyond one-size-fits-all solutions. For me, after everything I had learned during my studies in Germany, this was nothing less than revolutionary: Galtung’s approach to conflict resolution did not involve compromises, which often result in both sides of the conflict having the feeling that they have given up too much. His theory was that a breakthrough can only happen once all parties in a conflict force themselves to overcome their old ways of thinking, which results in everyone being satisfied in the end.

*Are Galtung’s methods successful?*

There have been some successes, for example, in the case of the resolution of





some border conflicts through the formation of joint-run national parks. But what has impressed me most is that in spite of the countless failed attempts at mediation, whether in Sri Lanka or Iraq, he continues to promote complete nonviolence rooted in the key skills of empathy, creativity and nonviolence, which he describes in his book ‘Peace by Peaceful Means’. And also that he does not shy away from bold assertions, such as his prediction about the downfall of the US empire by 2020, which he made during a debate with Samuel P. Huntington at Neuhardenberg Palace, regardless of how people react to them. Despite

being such a big name, Johan stayed in the same hostel as us, cooked, ate and sat in the sauna with us—as if he wouldn’t have had it any other way. He wanted to win us over for his cause. And he did so consistently, also by acknowledging us as equals to him in the discussions we had.

*Galtung formulated his concept of ‘structural violence’ when the reception of structuralist thought was in its heyday. Louis Althusser, for example, undertook a structuralist reinterpretation of Marxist theory. Did that play a role?*

I don’t know if Galtung engaged with Althusser’s work. In my view, what is



important in this context is that in his 1971 article 'A Structural Theory of Imperialism', which is of vital importance to this discussion, Galtung does not conceive of structural violence as simply another formulation for capturing the structural conditions of violence. Rather, he equated structures themselves with violence, in so far as they represent inequality and prevent people from exhausting their actual or presumed potential for development. Inequality is therefore not only a phenomenon of structural violence but is, at the same time, its very condition.

*If each instance of a discrepancy between the actual and the potential can be decried as violence, that leaves very little room for conditions of nonviolence.*

I am familiar with the critique of Galtung's interpretation of inequality as a relation of violence, and also with the criticism that his definition of structural violence is broad and vague. What is important for me, however, as much now as it was then, is that we have Galtung to thank for the fact that the concept of violence has been expanded to include phenomena such as poverty, hunger, subordination and social exclusion, and that the options for peace have also increased as a result. Equally, I find the category of cultural violence in his triangular model of violence helpful in the analysis of conflicts. For if structural violence is institutionalised and cultural violence internalised, then the risk of personal, direct violence establishing itself also increases. Overall, I have always understood Galtung's work much more as peace rather than conflict studies.

*How do you see his idea relating to the wider debate around peace politics?*

Johan Galtung is controversial, particularly in Germany and even in academic circles as well, because he is often suspected of pursuing political rather than scholarly goals. His ideas are also criticised for failing to explain war as such. And whilst it is true that the idea of structural violence does encompass violent conflicts, positive peace does presuppose negative freedom. I think that the criticism goes hand in hand with a crisis in critical peace studies in general, which construes scholars who are critical of the system, and thereby also theories of structural violence, as an attack against the peacekeeping power of the state.

*The Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung has set up a dialogue programme under the heading 'Positive peace'. Why?*

We chose the concept because it aims to establish lasting peace that does not only put an end to direct violence. We pose questions, such as what forms of structural violence do we see? How and at what point do these transform into direct violence? What forms of resistance and social and political movements against direct and indirect violence are there? What are left-wing political answers to direct and structural violence? What might a left-wing 'politics of positive peace' look like?

*And what might it look like?*

Not waiting until the horse has bolted to start thinking about peace; the causes of conflict need to be taken into account. Furthermore, conflicts exist long before they erupt into open violence. This is where a politics of positive peace can be used pre-emptively: in cases of political discrimination or human rights violations, unfair socioeconomic distribution, the relations of cooperation and competition between states and blocs in the context of sales markets and global resources in the world's capitalist economy, environmental protection or states' pursuit of their own geopolitical interests, which can very quickly upscale local conflicts to proxy wars. Something has to change here if peace is to be more than merely the temporary absence of war.

*In light of this, what is your view of German development policy?*

Development policy in its current form is not concerned with fostering structures that would enable the people of those regions to establish and participate in what Galtung describes as peace. This is clear, for example, in the programmes driving the large-scale industrialisation of agriculture in developing countries. This exacerbates the injustices in rural areas tremendously. Such projects, based on purely economic logic and co-financed with private capital, where little more than green innovation centres are cultivated on the land, are simply unable to establish positive peace. Quite the opposite: they will encourage new sources of structural violence to emerge.

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Translation by Dr. Carly McLaughlin and Nivene Rafaat for lingua•trans•fair



# Rethinking feminism

More than just a treaty between two fronts: on the role of women in the Colombian peace process By Kathrin Gerlof

Peace, which is more than just a treaty between two warring fronts, needs to contain an ideal of social transformation that rids society of violence and guarantees women the same rights as men. For Columbia, despite the historical signing of a peace treaty in 2016 between the Santos government and the FARC guerrilla group (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) following more than four years of negotiations, this goal remains elusive.

“We are not aware of any examples of peace treaties in other countries that have incorporated the gender perspective to such a great extent, let alone the issue of women’s active participation,” says feminist and activist Rocio Claros. She sees this achievement as a result of the major role played by women’s organisations and movements as well as the way in which many women have organised themselves collectively over many years.

Whilst the peace treaty negotiations were ongoing, a sub-committee responsible for the issue of gender—called and fought for by women—scrutinized the terms of the treaty with regard to women’s rights. This was the outcome of years of struggles throughout which different women’s organisations and activists had repeatedly said that there would be no peace if women were excluded. During the peace talks, women campaigned for new laws and state programmes in the agricultural sector, for equal access to livestock and arable land, as well as other issues.

In October 2016 a referendum was held in which a majority, under the powerful influence of conservative, right-wing forces and evangelical churches, voted against the peace treaty. This ‘no vote’ was also a vote against women. But the treaty was signed anyway and then renegotiated to such an extent that it in many ways no longer resembled the original document. Nevertheless, the organised women of Columbia succeeded in making sure that the gender aspect was retained. A commission was set up to oversee the implementation of and adherence to the rights enshrined in the treaty. Of the 2,136 candidates in the Special Jurisdiction for Peace, 863 are women. New platforms and grassroots organisations have been established.

The Afro-Columbian environmental and human rights activist Francia Márquez says: “I believe it is women who are the drivers of political and social change. Even if they are not always on the front line, they shape the everyday world. (...) We are the continuation of a historical struggle. (...) I think we need to revisit the way we think about feminism and see that we can’t claim to be feminists without fighting against racism and the current economic system.”

Here Márquez also describes the impasse Columbia has been caught in since the peace treaty was

signed, the initial euphoria over which has long since faded for many people. This is largely because the violence has not only endured; it has in fact increased. And because economic conditions are facilitating and accentuating new and more extreme forms of violence.

The population now lives with the terror of paramilitary groups. Between the end of 2016 and August 2018, 3,501 individuals involved in social movements were murdered, twice as many as in the preceding two years. During the peace talks the alliance between military doctrine and economic policy was never put on the negotiating table. Indeed, the government has pursued its aim of making territory previously under the control of FARC attractive for investors. Military violence is part and parcel of such a strategy.

The disarming of the FARC has failed to bring about peace because the increasingly watered-down peace treaty did not address the actual causes of the conflict: social, economic and political inequality. Instead, things are getting worse. The concentration of land ownership in Columbia is currently the highest in the world, with 81 per cent of areas controlled by 1 per cent of landowners. The peace treaty left this state of affairs untouched. Although small farmers were promised that 8 per cent of land areas would be handed over to them, this is yet to happen.

With his tax reform, Iván Duque, the current president from the ultra-right-wing Centro Democrático party, wants to reduce the burden on big business and to increase VAT. Columbia is already known to be one of the world’s most unequal countries. Female activists such as Rocio Claros do not tire of pointing out the fatal consequences of an increasingly extractivist economic policy, which pushes through megaprojects in the energy and mining sectors and is “based on an unbridled commercialisation and exploitation of nature”. Both of these have an impact—on women in particular and their living conditions—for such megaprojects destroy local communities, hampering in turn the organisation of resistance. At the same time, in Claros’ view, they also hinge on the control of women and their bodies; large projects bring with them widespread slavery, prostitution and sexual exploitation.

Women are equally at risk of falling victim to the extremely violent machismo that is connected with the drugs trade. This is evidenced, among other things, by the increase in surgical cosmetic interventions: “The drug dealer commissions a woman’s body,” as Claros puts it.

Even if women have enjoyed a series of legal breakthroughs over the past few years, such as the right to abortion, it remains the case that for Colombian society, peace—understood as more than just a treaty



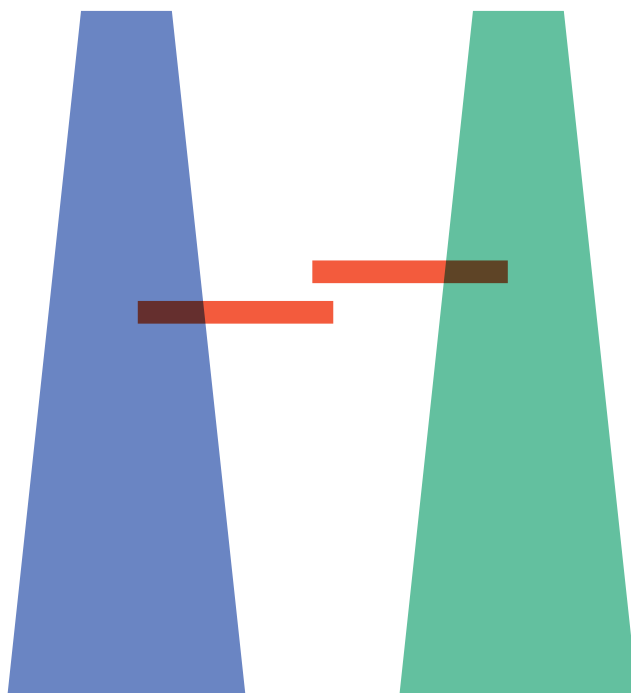
## Global protests against the Vietnam war

‘Vietnam jungle warfare reaches Germany’: these were the words written in a 1965 report in the German magazine *Der Spiegel* on the appeal of West German intellectuals ‘to immediately end the war and declare all of Vietnam neutral territory’. The conflict over the independence and unity of the country had at that point already raged for several years, first with the Indochina war (1946-1954) against French colonial rule, and then after 1956 in the war between communist North Vietnam and the US-backed South Vietnam.

The war triggered a large-scale international protest movement; the images of areas bombed with napalm, spraying of Agent Orange defoliant and the tremendous suffering of the civilian population stoked rage and indignation. After the mid-1960s, resistance began to grow, at first in the US, fuelled by older protest movements such as those against nuclear weapons and for civil rights. As an exhibition by the Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung showed in 2018 on the 50th anniversary of the Tet Offensive and 1968, workers from the UK and the Three Continent Mobilization Committee in Cuba also expressed solidarity with the protests.

At the time, in particular the growing student movement made the call to end the war central to their agenda. In February 1968, the International Vietnam Congress at the Technische Universität in West Berlin was to become one of the most important events of the student movement. The US approach taken in Vietnam provided a good starting point for a fundamental criticism of the realities of Western democracies. This, too, was concerned with reviving internationalism and the class struggle. Moreover, it provided opportunities to agitate against the support of anti-colonial liberation movements and criticise inter-government alliances such as those between Germany and right-wing authoritarian regimes in South America, Asia and Africa.

In the early 1970s, the Pentagon Papers were published in the US showing that, contrary to official claims, the war had been planned even before the US officially intervened—as a measure to thwart the advance of communism. In 1973, a ceasefire agreement stipulated the withdrawal of all US troops, making the military collapse of South Vietnam merely a question of time. ■



between two warring fronts—remains a distant reality.

Francia Márquez describes it as follows: “There is a feigned apprehension of peace so that the mining companies can operate in regions where it was previously not possible. I think this will lead to a resurgence of the conflict. Now there are armed individuals in areas that were previously under the control of the FARC. Paramilitary activity has returned and the killing of human rights activists continues to rise. Columbia is going back to where it started.”

In light of these developments, many women’s organisations are currently discussing how they can think and act intersectionally. And that entails coming together. It is important, Marquez says, to dismantle the patriarchal system together and to transform it as a community.

In this sense, the successes gained by Colombian women in and through the peace talks should not be understated, even if the terms that they fought for and negotiated over, and which were then written down, did not lead to peace in the true sense of the word. “We Colombian women have come a long way,” Claros says. “From speaking out and being recognised as victims, to our demands for the truth to be acknowledged and for justice. Over the course of these protests and lawsuits, we have organised ourselves and acquired political tools that have enabled us to change the reality of our own lives and those of our communities.”

The women of Columbia have established themselves as political subjects. This is something that cannot be ignored, and only undone with great force.

Translation by Dr. Carly McLaughlin and Nivene Rafaat for *lingua•trans•fair*



# “The left scene is very small here”

Krunoslav Stojaković on the 100th anniversary of Yugoslavia, a disintegrated country

*Let me start with a very direct question: is there peace in former Yugoslavia?*  
Yes, there is. Whether or not that includes social peace, however, is another story. Generally speaking, armed hostilities ceased after the peace processes and treaties. This applies primarily to Bosnia-Herzegovina, Serbia and Kosovo. The latter of the three is currently receiving increased media coverage, as its official recognition appears imminent. People in Serbia are fully aware of this. The question is how the issue concerning the rights of the Serb minority in Kosovo will be resolved. This is the real problem, not so much Kosovo's independence as such. The foundation for the state of Bosnia-Herzegovina in its current structure was laid out by the Dayton Agreement of 1995. Although utterly dysfunctional, the country does enjoy peace in the narrower sense of the word. The questions here are what kind of living conditions can be or have been achieved, and which actors are in power and impede or prevent the state's proper functioning? Then there are its two neighbouring states, Serbia and Croatia, both of which do occasionally pursue their own national self-interest. But strictly speaking, there is peace.

*And yet this does not apply to the same extent to the social dimension: that is to say, one of the elements that constitute the concept of positive peace. Are there structural causes to the ongoing conflicts, and has there been or is there any kind of critical reappraisal of the past?*

I don't think there are substantial efforts being undertaken in this regard, although it is not exclusively the choice of the local governments, either. Croatia, for example, is part of the EU and the European economic system. The same is true in the case of Serbia, which is forced to abide by the EU's diktat concerning the required measures for its accession, essentially producing negative consequences for the country's economy. In my view, it would be unfair to place all the blame on the respective governments.

*What does that mean?*

They are part of the international economic structure, and the capitalist

restoration, which has been ongoing since the 1990s, is only now being completed. The political elites as a whole consider accession to the European Union to be the conclusion of this process. In Croatia, the first phase of this privatisation process had coincided with the declaration of independence. The same (or similar) applies to Bosnia-Herzegovina. In Serbia, the privatisation process gathered pace, particularly after the ousting of Slobodan Milošević. The basic tendency was, as a first step, to nationalise what was once socially owned property; Yugoslavia differed from most other countries in that there was little property in the hands of the state itself, and most was instead socially owned. Then followed privatisation. Various actors enriched themselves, including foreign investors who purchased profitable enterprises below value and—albeit only rarely—continued production. This marked a wave of deindustrialisation, combined with a massive loss of jobs.

*What are the current developments?*

Currently, the main strategy is foreign direct investment—in the competition for which the countries undercut each other in order to become attractive for investors. Social rights and labour rights have been hollowed out through new social legislation. Today in Serbia, there are around 6,000 trade unions, a fragmentation that was deliberately pursued politically during the 2000s. All this, in combination with austerity and demands for budget cuts, add to the current neoliberal state of affairs. These economies are entirely dependent.

*You say that accession to the EU marks the completion of this process—do local civil society actors agree?*

All of those we work with are utterly sceptical of—if not downright hostile towards—the EU. EU membership has had very few positive effects for other south-eastern European countries like Bulgaria and Romania. Yet the rejection of EU membership and a retreat to the nation state is, of course, no solution either, seeing as the fundamental problem of economic dysfunctionality would remain in place. A progressive Left



**Krunoslav Stojaković**, born in 1978, studied history, political science and sociology, and is the director of the South-east European Regional Office of the Rosa-Luxemburg-Stiftung in Belgrade, Serbia. Together with Boris Kanzleiter, he has published the book *1968 in Jugoslawien. Studentenproteste und kulturelle Avantgarde zwischen 1960 und 1975* (J. H. W. Dietz). The interview was conducted by Anne Schindler.



cannot pursue the project of retreating to the national arena, but must instead seek out new options. What could a different form of European cooperation look like? Unfortunately, such debates about conceiving and articulating a socialist alternative to the current form of the EU are hardly taking place. This is not least related to the Left's capacities on the ground: the broader social Left is very small in our country. Currently, the intellectual breadth required for such debates is simply lacking.

*What part do the international actors who intervened in the war during the 1990s have in producing this situation?*

They are central to today's situation. In fact, these circumstances are the source of much criticism in the sense that it was—and still is—the Western power bloc that is attempting to enrich itself and to keep the Balkans in a marginal position. Even member states like Greece—which, despite all its problems, is not comparable to the statelets of former Yugoslavia—have had a taste of what it means when EU institutions flex their muscles and enforce their positions. Indeed, this experience is another reason for resistance.

*What could a foundation contribute to the development of Left alternatives?*

We would very much like to contribute to this process, but we have no counterpart on the ground. We require local actors interested in engaging with these issues. Momentarily, we are working with a total of 15 partner organisations, most of whom we have worked with for many years. Continuity is essential, as we see ourselves not least as workers helping to build a new Left. There is a very agile and productive cooperation between leftist civil society actors and the more progressive trade union sector. After all, the weakness of the trade unions affects many people. Here, we can certainly have an impact, even from an international standpoint. Welfare state analysis, Marxist theory formation, a critique of the state—a lot is already happening.

*Where does this longing for the return to the nation-state come from?*

It has to do with the political elites. Of course, they can see for themselves how poorly these states are functioning and playing the nationalist card is their only option to maintain their legitimacy. It makes it easier to put the blame on the 'Other'. This started even before Yugoslavia's fragmentation with a very pronounced economic nationalism, when the richer northern republics, in particular, refused to continue paying into the solidarity fund. It is not all too dissimilar to what we see in Germany. This process was aggravated during the 1980s, especially in the wake of the nationalist Memorandum issued by the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts. And during the 1990s, the situation intensified with the naming and shaming of perpetrators in an attempt by the elites to distract from their own political and economic failure. The problem is not the general population. I am from Bosnia-Herzegovina. It is widely believed that people there hate each other's guts. As a result, there have been efforts to promote dialogue for thirty years now. This gets on people's nerves—constantly having to resolve issues with their neighbours that have little to do with the real problems.

*What are the real problems?*

The only economic strategy countries like Serbia have is direct foreign investment. For example, in Serbia, there is a German car component supplier called Dräxlmaier, which runs several production sites and enforces a ban on trade union organisation, something the company would not dream of practising back home in Bavaria. Such companies outsource production and secure all the benefits—the Serbian government provides free land, exempts these firms from paying taxes and subsidises wages—while keeping all the profit to themselves. Simultaneously, the strategy of foreign direct investment is not even all that successful to begin with, as there aren't that many investors. And those who do come are often in the low-wage sector.

Translation by Jan-Peter Herrmann and Nivene Rafaat for lingua•trans•fair



# Makueni's silent revolution

Theft of public resources is one of the biggest areas of conflict in Kenya. Now the village of Mwaani has found a way to tackle corruption By Anja Bengelstorff

Sometimes, the size of a block of stone can affect democracy. If it's too small, democracy could be at risk. But luckily, Phyllis Nduva, a 65-year-old farmer from Mwaani, a village of 1,000 people in eastern Kenya, has a mobile phone with a camera and knows how democracy works. It goes like this: Nduva photographs the blocks that a construction firm has just laid for the foundations of the village's new health centre. She sends the photos to another farmer, 33-year-old David Mutisya, the chairman of the building committee. He looks at the construction plans—which a county government engineer previously went through in detail with the building committee—and confirms Nduva's suspicions: the blocks are too small. The building committee summons the construction firm and confronts the site manager. Supplying materials that are smaller or of inferior quality than those specified in the order, while charging for the higher-quality product, is the language of corruption.

The farmers from Mwaani demand the correct blocks for the foundations. The health centre needs a solid footing. The site manager has no option. He is forced to replace the blocks. And he has to put up with members of the building committee prowling around his construction site every day, taking notes and watching every move his labourers make like hawks. There is nothing he can do about it because these farmers own the building: the residents of Mwaani wanted a health centre and now they are building one. And the county government will only pay the construction firm once the new owners are satisfied, and when they confirm to the county government in writing that the building has been completed as planned.

In Kenya, people don't challenge authority. Kenyans don't assert their rights and Kenyan villagers don't confront businesses. But the new constitution of 2010 devolves selected government functions to 47 newly formed counties. The functions include healthcare, preschool education and maintaining minor roads in rural areas. Two elections ago, in March 2013, the decentralisation plans started being implemented. Grassroots democracy is essential here. It is no longer the central government far away in Nairobi that decides how a village, town or county will develop, but the local people themselves.

Between them, the 47 counties receive at least 15 per cent of the national budget. Each individual county budget is calculated using a formula based on the size of the population, the size of the county and its poverty rate, as well as a fixed proportion for administrative costs. Each county has a local parliament led by a governor. Kenya is spending a lot on democracy.

"The presidency was the beast that had to be tamed," says Abraham Rugo, head of the Kenya Office

of the International Budget Partnership, an organisation that collaborates with civil societies around the world to analyse national budgets in order to improve the quality of governance. The 'beast' was embodied by Kenya's former president, Daniel arap Moi, who ruled the country as a dictator for decades until 2002 and wielded absolute power. His role became the root of all conflicts—only the president could decide where and how Kenya's resources, i.e. money, were distributed.

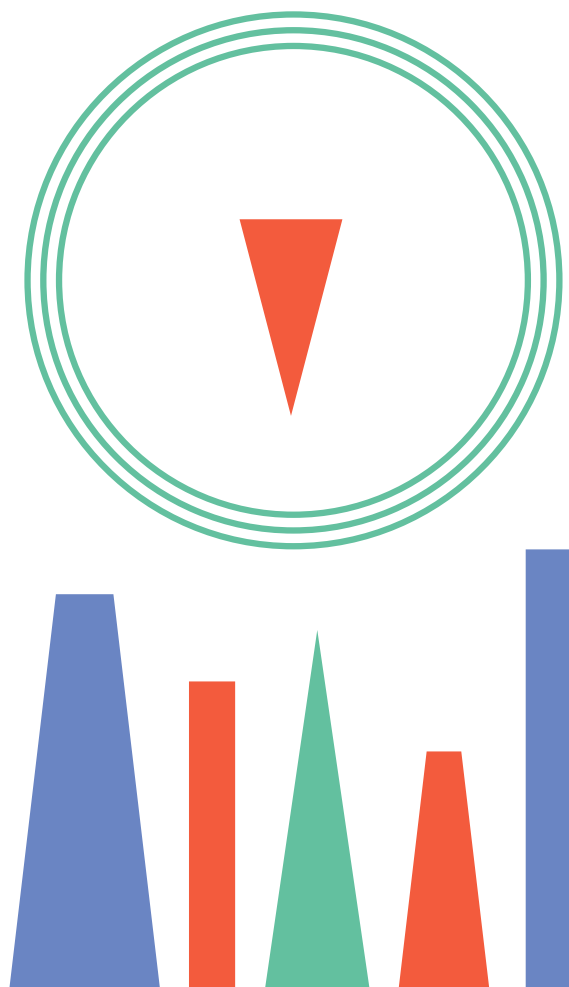
"There was no room for anyone else to have an equal say in running the country," says Rugo. The new constitution of 2010 was intended to decentralise power to prevent conflict—to clip the president's wings, devolving power horizontally to parliament and the judiciary, but also downwards to autonomous regional administrative units. The aim is to turn a society that is just about surviving into one that is flourishing. 'All sovereign power belongs to the people', according to Article 1 of the Kenyan constitution.

The constitution goes into great detail in order to defuse or ward off social conflicts. For instance, it provides for a clear recognition of marginalised groups, such as the Ogiek, an ethnic minority of around 35,000 people who live as hunter-gatherers in the forests of central Kenya and have been fighting for decades for their right to stay in the forests. What is more, no more than two-thirds of the members of an elective public body may be of the same gender. This rule is intended to give women better access to decision-making positions. However, the Kenyan parliament has still not managed to sign this rule into law and only 22 per cent of the country's MPs are women.

During President Moi's rule, it was his home region that had the most schools and the best roads. Kenyans in other parts of the country had never set foot on a paved road. In order to distribute resources more fairly across the regions and to avoid resentment between Kenya's 44 ethnic groups, the constitution divides the country into 47 counties. In the village of Mwaani, people have grasped the spirit of the constitution and are not letting go of their new-found decision-making autonomy. Mwaani is in the county of Makueni. People here depend on agriculture. There are plenty of mangos and oranges, but water supply is a problem. Nearly two-thirds of the population of just under one million lives in poverty.

But a silent revolution is spreading in Makueni: the county is seen as a model for successful decentralisation. It is the only one of the 47 counties in Kenya to have clear guidelines and structures for the political education of its citizens. Long before the structural changes took place, the civilian population in this area was one of the most active in the country. However, it is one man in particular who leads Makueni.





He is seen as the father of decentralisation and was very influential in drawing up the parts of the constitution that relate to devolution. He is Kivutha Kibwana, a law professor, referred to respectfully as ‘Prof’ by the local people.

“We feel great,” says David Mutisya, the chairman of the building committee in Mwaani. “We are being taken seriously at last.” The farmers of Mwaani got together and decided that the nearest hospital—in Wote, the capital of Makueni County—was too far away and they wanted a health centre in the village. When the county government asked them what they wanted, they were ready. They formed a building committee, which includes seven villagers as well as county government experts, and elected the young farmer David Mutisya to the position of chairman. The construction will cost around 30,000 euros—and not one cent more than the estimate. These management committees are the people’s key to democracy. They provide transparency and give people the feeling that decisions are not simply being taken over their heads. “People understand now: it’s our project and it’s our money,” says Patrick Mutunga, a member of the building committee.

However, although the progressive constitution is a powerful tool for resolving deep-seated conflicts that have been simmering for decades, the Kenyan

government keeps undermining its implementation. “The government makes sure that the counties are not given enough money to function properly,” says Abraham Rugo. “Although the health system is completely decentralised, the national government still controls 70 to 80 per cent of its functions. Besides, it takes years to pass laws in parliament.” According to Rugo, the government is slowing down the processes to avoid having to relinquish any power.

For the administration expert, the constitution’s greatest achievement is having “heard the voice of the people”. However, he says, “This is also the aspect that’s most frequently abused.” Makueni’s progress is by no means typical for the country as a whole. The new administrative structure has also decentralised corruption: whereas, in the past, it was mainly government ministers who lined their own pockets, now the local parliaments are joining in. In a short space of time, people in positions of responsibility can be seen living in new houses, driving expensive cars, and hiring bodyguards at the taxpayer’s expense. They find ways of giving government contracts to businesses owned by their relatives, so that the profit stays in the family. One county has been digging a roadside ditch for two years. Now rubbish is piling up in the ditch because construction has stopped: someone ran off with the money for the construction firm.

The constitution provides for comprehensive control mechanisms when it comes to distributing public resources to the counties, but these procedures cost time and money. “Before a county gets its money to build a health centre, for instance, it needs approval from seven or eight authorities at various levels,” says Rugo. “We don’t trust one another or the system. This is one of the main causes of conflicts in Kenya. No one is held responsible for misconduct.” He is convinced that trust can only be built if an elected government fulfils its social contract with its citizens, “namely, taking care of everyone, regardless of who is in power,” and if laws apply to everyone.

At the moment, they don’t. No one in Kenya has ever been convicted of corruption, yet theft of public resources is one of the biggest areas of conflict for any government, including Kenya’s. Although President Uhuru Kenyatta declared corruption a national security risk in 2015, a Kenyan daily newspaper recently calculated that in the past five years, only 13 per cent of government expenditure was accounted for correctly. So much money leaks out of the government machinery that some government functions have come to a standstill.

“This conflict has never been as intense as it is today,” says Abraham Rugo, “but people are staying quiet,” for fear of losing the little they have fought so hard to accomplish. Kenyans have resorted to their private conflict-resolution strategies: a growing middle class can afford to look after itself and several family members. Other financial gaps are plugged by self-help groups and micro-insurance policies.

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Translation by Ros Mendy and Nivene Rafaat for  
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# Fuel for the movements

Steffen Kühne on contradictions in the fight for food sovereignty, food as a political issue, and the role of technology in alternative agricultural production

*It's a somewhat cumbersome term—when did you first hear about food sovereignty?*

**Steffen Kühne:** About six or seven years ago, so relatively recently. At the time people had been talking to me about La Vía Campesina, an international movement of peasant farmers and agricultural workers. I come from a leftist tradition that was quite receptive to the modernization of agricultural production, and which also opposes idealizing former, supposedly better conditions. Back then I thought technological advances would also benefit peasant farmers.

*And was that wrong?*

In principle, no. But then I came to better understand what La Vía Campesina does, and why this kind of self-organization and the principles behind it are worth considering. Others reached this conclusion way before I did.

*Can you explain “food sovereignty” in three sentences?*

It's about democratizing our food production system so that people can decide for themselves what they eat and how it is produced. It's about regaining control over a central aspect of our lives and standing up and saying that we don't

want our basic needs left in the hands of agricultural corporations. Ultimately, it's about taking back social power. Food sovereignty is grounded in reality: it was developed by peasant farmers and agricultural workers who wanted to regain control of their lives.

*It sounds a bit as if peasant farmers should become the left's new “historical subject”?*  
The real question is: aren't they already?

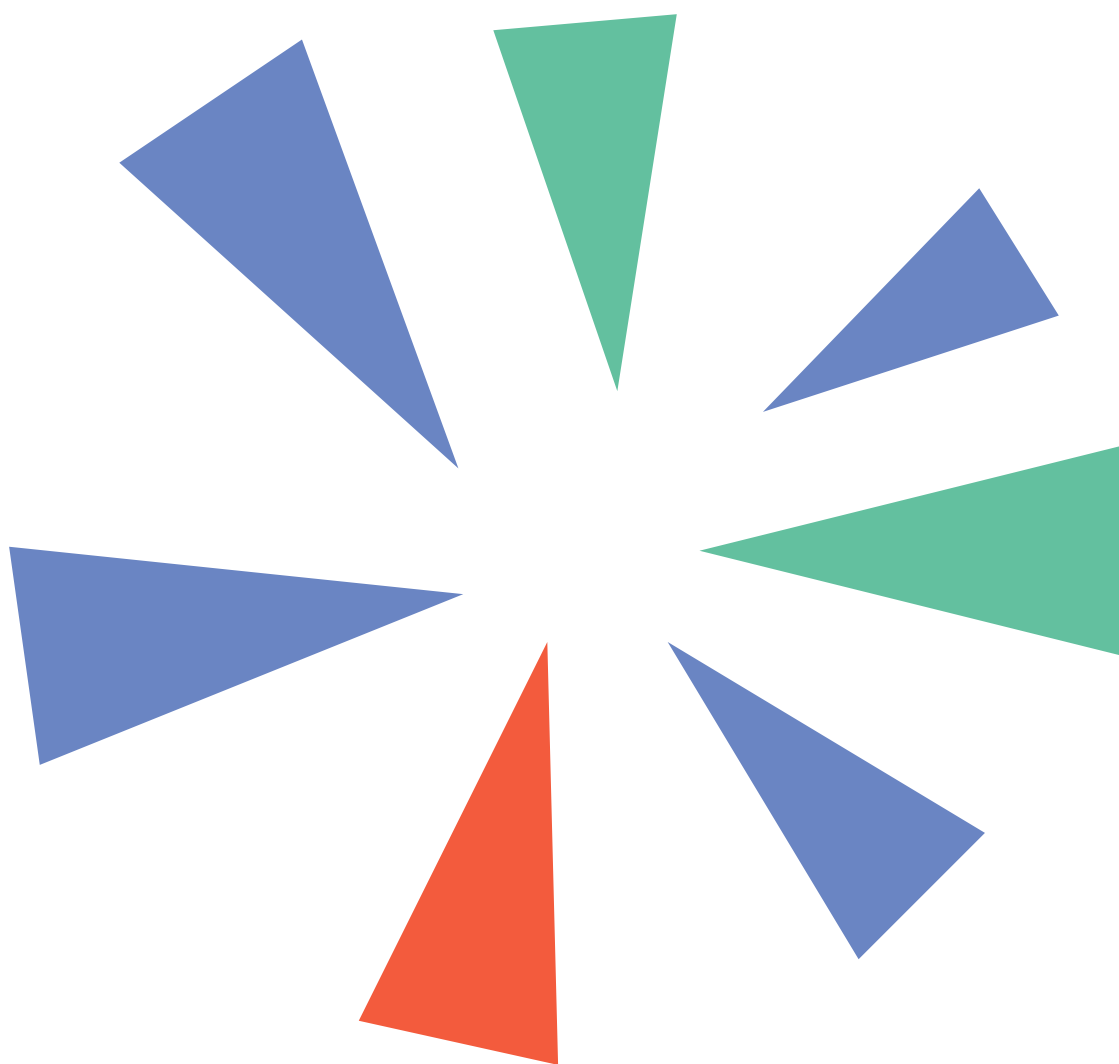
In large parts of the world, the population is mostly peasant farmers and agricultural workers. For many it is a life associated with pride and self-determination, not only bondage and destitution. And by no means do they all want to relocate to big cities. But now a huge wave of capitalist agricultural modernization is spreading across the world, and millions of people are being engulfed into something new, and they often end up disenfranchised and displaced in the process. Many of them are now fighting for their fully legitimate rights under the banner of food sovereignty. They want to participate in these processes of change, to shape them according to their own interests. The left should support that. If we're serious about ideas of democracy and self-determination, then we have to ask people about their concerns. And in



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many parts of the world, the population is rural and dependent on primary agricultural production.

*Can you give us a figure to help us understand the size of this group?*

Statistics vary greatly depending on who is included in the count. The International Labour Organization suggests that 1.1 billion people work in agriculture worldwide, 40 to 50 percent of whom are economically dependent workers.

*That alone suggests disparities within this group.*

Exactly. After all, peasant farmers aren't necessarily destitute. They are often land owners who, compared to dependent workers without land, are in an almost privileged position. Landless people in India, on the other hand, are in a very different situation.

*And in the Global North?*

We would never use the term peasant farmer here, even when talking about

the smallest farms. Even they are usually already the product of agricultural concentration. Peasant farming is, in other words, a political term, which brings together people who have shared concerns—and want to tackle them.

*Are there peasant farmers who exploit other humans as agricultural workers?*

Of course. In a variety of ways, even. It begins with self-exploitation, which in large parts of the world is the foundation of peasant agriculture and forces entire families into production. Other peasant farmers employ labourers. We can even take it a step further, and ask ourselves if a wage-earner in Germany who has bought Bayer shares as part of their retirement plan isn't, in a way, also benefitting from the agro-capitalist exploitation model. Not to mention that for a large number of people around the world, agriculture is a secondary occupation, meaning they are otherwise regularly employed. The boundaries start to blur.



*Does that create conflicts within the food sovereignty movement?*

People obviously hold a range of views. And occasionally there are tough debates. But this discrepancy—between the interests of the landless and those of the peasant farmers who are landowners, for example—is itself a source of motivation and fuel for the movements. Farmers establish the meaning of food sovereignty in the field. And real life is always full of contradictions.

*I'd like to come back to the relationship between modernization and preservation. After all, doesn't food sovereignty ultimately propagate and defend an image of idyllic rural life which in reality is anachronistic?*

At times: of course. That's one of the contradictions. Every movement needs a narrative, and among food sovereignty advocates there are many people who, in their fight against the devaluation of peasant existence, inevitably end up glorifying it. For example, the saying "farmers feed the world" obscures all the less than ideal conditions that exist alongside food production, such as the rigid gender roles occasionally found in farming communities. That kind of thing definitely needs clearing up, and we have to be willing to question such things. But it's no different with any other political movement.

*Fundamental issues of progressive culture and progressive values are tearing apart a number of movements here in Germany, as well.*

To start with, though, you have to understand the various perspectives. Here in the Global North, we live in a society where hardly anyone produces their own food anymore. So for the vast majority of people in Berlin or Buxtehude, food sovereignty is a question of consumption and the economics behind it. Who can only afford low-quality food, and why? In this country we can hardly ask the few remaining producers to be the sole starting point in the struggle against agrarian capitalism, even if there are of course very dedicated networks of small-scale farmers here. In the Global South, producers are often the majority. So it's more a matter of forming alliances on various levels: across the North-South divide, between producers and consumers. They are the alliances we need if we want to initiate change. The declaration of Nyéléni in 2007 (see box on page 17) was one attempt to involve a broader

public in the fight for food sovereignty.

*Some say farmers feed the world. But you often hear a different message: corporations feed the world. What's wrong with that picture?*

Without living labour, agricultural production would come to a halt, despite industrialization. What's more, corporations often buy up small farmers' products and feed them into their own value chains. Some experts calculate that two-thirds of the world's population is fed by peasant agriculture. But it's not only a matter of quantity. It's also about quality, and the kind of production methods we want to use.

*Because catastrophic famine still exists, the issue of productivity is always brought up in discussions about food production—often accompanied by a remark about how the demands of increasing populations can only be met by industrial and chemically enhanced methods.*

To begin with, the number of people able to be fed is ultimately not a question of productivity, but of distribution, meaning who gets how much of what's produced. Then there are the many different factors that can negatively impact productivity: political regimes, senseless agricultural reforms, climate change. And finally, in terms of yield per unit area, peasant agricultural production is often even much more effective than industrial methods. The reason is simple: if you know your soil well, if you're familiar with the climate in your region, if you're able to choose from varieties that haven't yet been cultivated to death, then you can produce differently. In contrast, certain agricultural production models currently being sold to the Global South as a kind of salvation effectively destroy the foundations of self-determined food production: the soil, the fauna, and so on. Sure, glyphosate use can dramatically increase short-term yields—but the medium-term consequences are fatal.

*The consequences of capitalist agricultural expansion and consumers' increasingly critical stance help to explain why the term "industrial" has practically become an invective.*

Yes, and it has also become a battle cry of sorts. To a certain extent that's justified. But we also have to ask ourselves: what's non-industrial agricultural production, anyway? The peasant with his self-made



hoe is, in any case, not a model for the future.

*Then what is?*

For us, agriculture should be ecologically sound, everyone should have enough to eat, nature shouldn't be destroyed in the process, and fair working conditions should be the norm. All of which leads to the question: how should we restructure the capitalist system of agriculture that currently exists? Industrialization also affords certain opportunities here. After all, whether or not you can produce sustainably or in a way that promotes solidarity with workers doesn't depend on machines alone. It hinges on the state of democracy on the farm, on the principles and objectives pursued, and the forms of ownership that operate.

*These debates seem to mirror those currently being held around automation and digitization.*

Exactly. If scientists can develop small recyclable and solar-powered robots to collect potato beetles, then large tractors—spraying all kinds of chemicals—can be kept out of the fields. That's just one example. But it's also true that precision farming, now being sold as the new big thing, will remain nothing but a lie until questions of ownership and democracy are resolved.

*Concerns around data are also becoming a key part of the discussion now as well.*

It's also true of agricultural production that whoever controls the data—the data that enables precision farming and the exact use of customized pesticides, for example—will have power over production and therefore over the products and thus the food—our food. If this power continues to remain in service to the logic of exploitation, humanity will soon be faced with an existential question. Because it's not like with Netflix or

Google, which “only” control our communication, knowledge, and aspects of our culture. This is about our food, and we can't just leave it in the hands of a few corporations.

*Let's come back to the terminology: we're primarily familiar with the word “sovereignty” from arguments that attempt to impose an ultimately nationalist perspective on an issue.*

I don't want to defend any terms here; what interests me are the concepts. The idea of food sovereignty was developed outside of Europe and its objectives are completely unrelated to, say, the idea of “national sovereignty”. It's about food producers participating broadly in decisions regarding food production.

*Who is the food sovereignty movement addressing its demands to?*

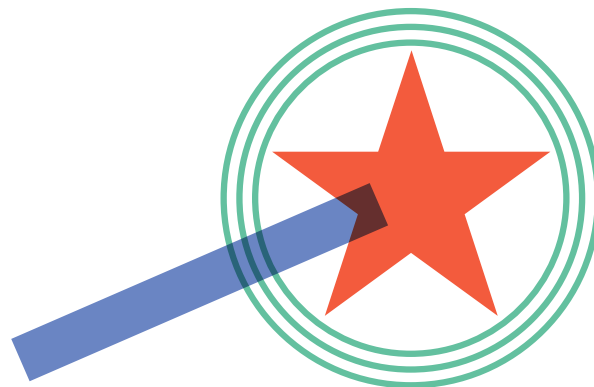
Even if self-organization is an important end in itself, this much is true: once you start demanding rights, you have to look to government, or your argument will remain entirely abstract. Rights that you can't sue for are a joke, and generally you can only sue for rights if regulations are in place, or if there has been some kind of transnational government agreement. That means we have to be hard on politicians and legislators.

*Do measures like fair trade seals help?*

What does the label “fair trade” on a product actually signal? That all other products were, at least, produced unfairly. That's an unacceptable state of affairs. And it's important that consumers don't think with their wallets alone, in terms of what they can afford. Food is a political issue and we are all political subjects. We need to get off our asses and see to it that the conditions change.

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Translation by Caroline Schmidt and Ryan Eyers for Gegensatz Translation Collective











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