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WHAT DOES SOCIALISM MEAN TODAY?

WHY OVERCOMING CAPITALISM IS STILL NECESSARY – AND POSSIBLE

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INHALT

Preface 5

Introduction 7

System CHANGE! 8

Why Keep Calling It Socialism? 9

Socialism: A Democratic Economy 11

What Does Socialism Mean in Practice and How Can It Emerge? 15

1 Socialism as a Project for Liberation 15
2 The Material Side of Freedom: Providing for Fundamental Needs 17
3 Overcoming Every Kind of Exploitative and Oppressive Relation 19
4 A Fundamentally New Relationship between Society and Nature 20
5 Transforming the Economy into One That Is Emissions-Free and Serves People's Needs 21
6 Financial Services in Public and Community Ownership 23
7 A New Model of Prosperity: The Good Life 24
8 An Economy that Puts Life First 25
9 Ecological and Democratic Economic Planning 27
10 A Social Economy with a Variety of Property Forms 29
11 New Relationships between the Market and Planning and between Various Forms of Property 32
12 A Global, Universal, and Anti-Militarist Movement 34
13 Socialism: Resolutely Anti-Fascist 36

Bibliography 38

PREFACE

This text is a pebble we're tossing into the water in the hope that it will make waves. Our goal is to initiate a debate about what socialism can mean today. This project began with a podium discussion at the 2023 *Sommerakademie der Bewegungslinken* on substantive left-wing visions for the future. Numerous participants asked why, as a socialist party, we have not been able to propagate a more-or-less popular narrative about socialism.

The point is well taken. The Left and Die Linke, the German party that seeks to represent it in parliament, are well-practised at identifying social ills. They are significantly less self-assured when it comes to analysing whether and how the multiple crises of the present are interconnected. And they are typically very quiet when it comes to talking about alternatives to capitalism. "Too far off", "completely unrealistic at the moment", "who actually wants a change of system and who's going to carry it out?" — these objections are often raised, effectively relegating the issue of systemic change to the distant future.

Yet we remain convinced of the need to generate more detailed descriptions and articulations of what an alternative to capitalism could look like. The Left needs a concept that clarifies the difference between the socialism towards which it aspires and the failed experiments of really existing socialism. The point is not to wish upon a star, but to take up and further develop approaches for which people are already fighting. Primary among these are examples of self-organization, solidarity, struggles for the common good, and participatory democracy, which emerge again and again among people in society, even if they are often quickly destroyed by the laws of the market and the valorization of capital.

Precisely at a time when we are witnessing a shift to the right and strengthening fascist tendencies, it is politically fatal for leftists to confine themselves to defending liberal democracy (with its regime of social inequality) against the Right. Instead, we need a realistic vision of an alternative, meaning: how can a better life be achieved, what social preconditions need to be created for it to become possible? We need a project that enables the vast majority of people to enjoy better working, living, and environmental conditions than the stunted ones offered by capitalism, whose destructive forces have become a danger to the survival of a large part of humanity.

The ability of the Left to gain in strength and go on the political offensive again will depend on our capacity to provide a convincing answer to the question of what we mean by socialism today. We see this brochure as an invitation to discussion addressed to the many people, young and old, who are active in left-wing circles, initiatives, and movements, or in Die Linke, and who give thought to the issue of an anti-capitalist alternative.

According to the late cultural critic Mark Fisher, capitalism in the twenty-first century has succeeded in presenting itself as completely without alternative. If we want to break the hegemony of a capitalism that acts as if there is no alternative, we need to strive to tell a positive story. In the pages that follow, we attempt to explain why we continue to refer to this project as socialism.

Bernd Riexinger and Raul Zelik
Stuttgart and Berlin, summer 2024

INTRODUCTION

The crisis is everywhere and it threatens our life: new wars all the time, with the potential to turn into a world war at any moment; climate change, species extinction, and the breakdown of nature's metabolic cycles; growing social inequality, homelessness, and poverty; the spread of racism and the seemingly ineluctable rise of the far right... All while it is becoming ever more obvious that this catastrophic development is inextricably linked with our economic and social system — capitalism.

The links are plain to see: if all areas of life are subordinated to ruthless market competition, it's only logical that groups, classes, and states are willing to also assert their interests through overt violence and war, if necessary. When the entire economic system rests on a built-in growth imperative, it is only logical that every area of nature and life should be required to "generate value", or in other words: to be transformed into a commodity. When the amassing of private wealth is the most important principle of action in a society, social inequality and the contradictions between classes must grow, since profits increase when the portion reserved for wages falls. And ultimately, racism and fascism are almost unavoidable in a world in which the market rules. Or, as the Black abolitionist Ruth Wilson Gilmore (2007: 243) puts it: "In the contemporary world, racism is the ordinary means through which dehumanization achieves ideological normality." Wherever class oppositions emerge, racism and fascism are never far away, since the dehumanization and super-exploitation of the poor have to be legitimated somehow if domination is to remain stable.

Putting an end to the crises of the present would require forms of cooperation that transcend state and ethnic boundaries. This is the only way to stop wars, prevent the collapse of ecological systems, reduce the global consumption of resources, and halt the immiseration of a significant portion of the world's population. But this is precisely what capitalism cannot do — solidarity and cooperation are not its speciality. It is based on competition and profit maximization, implacable rivalries between individuals and nation states, the transformation of nature into value, and the exploitation of human beings. It fuels precisely that atmosphere of civil war that makes us all so afraid: "all against all, everyone for themselves".

SYSTEM CHANGE!

For these reasons, it seems obvious to us: within the existing economic and social system, the crises will only worsen. If we wish to head off the approaching catastrophes, we need an alternative to capitalism. And the task of the Left is to clarify what system change might look like.

We don't mean to suggest that this should involve elaborate utopian designs. For an anti-capitalist alternative to have an effect on social developments, it has to be concrete: it must link up with issues that are being contested in the here and now. It is no use having a master plan for a future society if there aren't already also contemporary movements, struggles, and practices that anticipate a utopian future and make it possible to envisage. Put differently: cooperatives show how a more democratic economy could look; in workplace struggles, people realize that solidarity has a greater creative power than market competition; equality emerges when hierarchies in movements, projects, organizations, or public institutions are replaced by democratic procedures.

In this sense, to speak of system change is not merely radical posturing: every ecological, social, egalitarian, feminist, or anti-militarist change in the here and now is meaningful and important. But the objection that one ought to try to solve smaller everyday problems instead of posing the big question of how to change the entire system has itself become utopian. These days, massive forces are mobilized to defeat even the most moderate reforms so as to prevent the development of a social atmosphere in which people might begin to discuss the interests of the wealthy. A politics of small steps has become as utopian as the politics of a radical break. Every step in the direction of equality, sustainability, democracy, and international cooperation runs counter to the logic of capital and has to be made through tough struggles. For this reason, system change and concrete improvements necessarily go together.

WHY KEEP CALLING IT SOCIALISM?

But why do we continue to designate an egalitarian, ecological society, a society in which solidarity is real, as socialism? Has this term not become unusable since the experiences of the twentieth century?

Yes, it's true: Stalinism attempted to bludgeon every form of critical consciousness out of people. All socialist states took up the authoritarian heritage of Stalinism in one way or another. And in almost all cases, the rise of socialist state power involved the oppression of dissident groups and individuals' desires for self-determination. For millions of people, "actually existing socialism" was no emancipation. Leftists should never lose sight of this, and cannot be allowed to trivialize the crimes that were committed.

But what does this mean for us today? The idea that socialism can simply be introduced by a revolutionary party through nationalization, a planned economy, and education programmes has been shown to be wrong. This idea of socialism as a roadmap to a free, classless society has failed. The unbounded power of the leading party produced new forms of oppression and to some extent also new social classes.

The idea that "the state" is something like the antidote to capital was obviously also wrong. Rather, leftists should look to the analyses produced by Greek theorist Nicos Poulantzas (2014), who described the state as the "material condensation of social relationships of force". A capitalism without a state could not exist, because the competition between market actors, and also social conflicts, must both be regulated. In this sense, as Poulantzas goes on to elaborate, the state organizes the general parameters of class rule (and thus by no means works to maintain the common good), but the state is also the terrain on which social conflicts are fought out. It is therefore eminently possible for demands from below to be written into the state. In other words: social struggles tend to make states more egalitarian and democratic, but without calling into question the nature of the state as an organizer of class rule. The state blocks the path to a liberated, classless society, even when the government is left-wing.

For this reason, Antonio Gramsci, one of the greatest Marxist thinkers of the twentieth century, believed that socialism would have to be based

on completely new political institutions. According to Gramsci, it is not enough to change the state's political personnel. At the same time, there is no way for the socialist movement to avoid the necessity of conquering state power because just as the state presently ensures the principle of competition and the power of the wealthy, new institutions would have to be created to promote solidarity, equality, and real democracy, or in other words to overcome class society and replace the principle of competition with conscious cooperation.

No doubt these new political institutions of which Gramsci spoke more closely resemble cooperatives, citizens' councils, and organs of self-management than the government agencies and bureaucracies we know from capitalist and socialist states. The socialism of the future will have to be founded on a radically democratized idea of political power.

SOCIALISM: A DEMOCRATIC ECONOMY

Our project is therefore centred not on the state, but on a democratically organized social economy. But why place the emphasis on the economy and not society? The starting point of socialist theory is the observation that, first, liberal-bourgeois societies are far from as free as they think they are, and, second, this unfreedom is closely linked to property relations.

Indeed, political liberalism systematically obscures the fact that in bourgeois society the only people who are free are the ones who possess the requisite financial means, in other words: those who possess wealth. Although everyone else counts as formally free and equal before the law, in actual fact their lives are largely determined by things beyond their control. For a significant portion of their lives, they are forced to make their capacity to work available to others, or else — like the great majority of people in the Global South, but also many poor people in the rich industrial countries — they are fully denied the possibility of living a dignified life. Despite the fact that freedom is continually being invoked in liberal societies, most people live in extreme unfreedom. What's more, the freedom of some is inextricably linked to the subjugation of others, since it is the work of those who are not free that increases the wealth, and thereby also the freedom, of the rich.

This starting point explains why the socialist movement targets property relations, rather than taking aim at the arbitrary rule of aristocrats and despots (as liberalism does) or at state power (as anarchism does). Property that is concentrated in the hands of the few — and of course we are speaking here not of private residences or family-owned bakeries, but major productive and financial assets — is the most significant source of power in our society. Every child essentially knows this: "money makes the world go round". But this ultimately also means that in order to live more freely, we have to change property relations. Without strong common property and socioeconomic equality, individual freedoms and democracy will remain a farce. That is why we hold fast to the concept of socialism.

But haven't these property relations, or, to be more precise, hasn't competition between private enterprises proved itself to be a source of prosperity worldwide? In liberal theories of society, this is precisely how it is presented: the "invisible hand of the market" transforms the self-interest

of property owners into the common good. Prices indicate which ways of producing goods are the most efficient and where resources can be most profitably deployed; competition gives rise to the greatest possible degree of social prosperity. Yet this narrative, which never corresponded to the truth — historically, capitalism was based on subjection through warfare, colonial plunder, and enslavement, not on free markets — remains a chimera. The world market still continues to demonstrate its destructive powers, day after day: armed conflicts, the destruction of nature, social polarization, decrepit infrastructure, the degradation of healthcare and education systems, and so on. The idea that the market can solve the major ecological and social problems of our time behind our backs must be repudiated as liberal utopianism. Or as an ideological manoeuvre that conceals the actual power relations in society — because behind the call to let the market run its course lies the interest of owners in not having to trouble themselves about the demands of the majority of the population. Letting "the market" take care of things means letting the Bezoses, the Musks, the Porsches, the Albrechts, the Schwarzes, and the oil sheikhs rule undisturbed.

We therefore believe that the biggest threat to democracy emanates not from an ideologically founded political movement, hence not from the frequently invoked "enemies of a liberal society", but from capitalism itself. More precisely: fascism almost inevitably takes root in liberal economic soils, which undermine democracy on a daily basis. In a system in which billionaires such as Rupert Murdoch or the Springer family can use their media empires to systematically influence public opinion, and in which the devaluation of people in work contexts simultaneously produces dehumanizing ideologies, the escalation of fascist tendencies is unavoidable.

Racism stoked from above ensures that frustration about social conditions is not directed against the powerful but takes shape as an "alliance of the mob and elites", as philosopher Hannah Arendt (1951) once put it. That is precisely what the new fascism of the Donald Trumps, Elon Musks, and Jair Bolsonaros of the world is: an alliance of the super-rich with middle- and lower-class people afraid of losing their position in society against groups that are first marked out as "inferior".

But there are also ecological reasons why we must make property relations our focus. The fact that despite countless political declarations of intent, greenhouse gas emissions continue unabated is not primarily a result of a "political failure", as people in the climate movement often

claim. Capital itself is responsible for these developments. The most important maxim of the "free market" is, of course, that wealth is to be invested in ways that will increase its value. As Marx (1990: 742) already quipped in the nineteenth century: "Accumulate! Accumulate! That is Moses and the prophets." On the one hand, this means that resourceful entrepreneurs are continually developing new products — which are frequently so superfluous that the desire for them has to be implanted in us by elaborate advertising campaigns. On the other hand, it also leads to the necessity of economically "tapping" sphere after sphere of life in order to maintain "growth", which is to say: the ongoing augmentation of capital. Sociologist Klaus Dörre calls this *Landnahme*, or land grabbing: arable land, rainforests, the education sector, health systems, and drinking water are forced to "generate value", even if this involves their destruction. The most dazzling example of this delusional process of expansion is the transformation of tropical rainforest into soy or palm oil plantations. This process confers tremendous economic growth rates on some regions of the Global South, yet leaves green deserts behind. The biodiversity of the tropical forest is transformed into monocultures, which quickly disintegrate entirely in the absence of industrial fertilizers and pesticides. The generation of monetary value goes hand in hand with enormous destruction of real wealth (namely biodiversity).

Here we see that capitalism is a one-dimensional structure. It finds no value in nature that has not been opened up for agriculture or tourism, free public infrastructure, reduced or short working hours, or the leisure needed to be able to lead an enjoyable life. It sees a gain in prosperity only in commodities that are traded on the market. For as long as there remain areas of life that have not yet been commodified, capitalism will refuse to respect ecological boundaries.

In this context, it is also important to point out that this destructive irrationality is not driven by "greed", "excessive consumerism", an "ideology of growth", or abstract economic laws, but by class relations. Unlike in feudalism, in capitalism it is not noble blood but successful accumulation that places a person in the upper class. Even ecologically conscious entrepreneurs are required to strive to expand if they don't wish to lose out to the competition over the longer term. Conversely: anyone who wishes to halt ecological destruction must impose boundaries on the class of property owners by prohibiting certain business models. Of course, this is precisely what would elicit massive resistance and lead to an intensification of class struggle.

Many will now object that the destruction of the environment was often much worse in socialist states. That is true: common property alone is no guarantee for ecological sustainability. Publicly owned electricity companies can also run brown coal power plants, socialist states can also degrade whole regions, cooperatives can deal in combustion engines and individualized approaches to transport. But as US philosopher Nancy Fraser put it during a lecture in Berlin in 2022: "Socialism *can* destroy nature. Capitalism *must* destroy nature." That is also true, by the way, for social goals: it is also possible for one class to rule over another under conditions of collective property. While common property is no guarantee, it is a necessary condition for social relations characterized by equality, solidarity, and ecological stewardship.

It is in this sense that we understand socialism as the political movement that opposes the exploitative logic of capital and halts the transformation of all areas of life into commodities. In other words, socialism is a movement for decommodification. Its goal is to enable the *good life for everyone,* and its achievements are to be measured by whether or not it succeeds in bolstering a society's tendencies toward solidarity, equality, and ecological sustainability.

WHAT DOES SOCIALISM MEAN IN PRACTICE AND HOW CAN IT EMERGE?
13 ELEMENTS OF SOCIALISM

1 SOCIALISM AS A PROJECT FOR LIBERATION

Precisely because the state socialism of the twentieth century involved enormous oppression, our first point must be: socialism is a project for liberation that aims at the self-determination and free development of the individual.

According to the *Communist Manifesto* by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels (2002 [1848]: 244), "in place of the old bourgeois society, with its classes and class antagonisms, we shall have an association, in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all." The Left must return to this demand: socialism is always also about *individual rights.*

The condition for this individual freedom is the overcoming of structural relationships of exploitation and exclusion. In a society in which some possess economic and political power and others have nothing but their labour power, in which some are citizens and others are illegalized as migrants, freedom does not prevail. The overcoming of economic exploitation and political exclusion is the condition for universal freedom.

But fundamental political and human rights (such as freedom of opinion and the press, the right to demonstrate, organize, and strike, and the rights to vote and stand for election) must form an inalienable component of any socialist project. Our criticism of the liberal state is not that it has established a representative democracy that hinders the arbitrary rule of single individuals, but that this democracy doesn't go far enough since it remains restricted to the political sphere and separates the economic off as something "private". Socialist democracy also encompasses economic life, workplace relations, and the productive and reproductive activities of a society. Self-management, which is a central component of a socialist project, is not possible without political liberties.

In this context, it is important to emphasize that freedom of opinion and the press are threatened by existing corporate media and internet platforms no less than by state censors. The existence of private media companies is not an expression of freedom of opinion; one might just as well argue that the publication of Pravda and numerous other newspapers in the Soviet Union was an expression of a flourishing media landscape.

Media outlets and platforms must be radically democratized. The structure of public broadcasters shows how media outlets could be organized if they were subject neither to corporate owners nor to government bureaucrats. This model, which was introduced in Germany in the late 1940s, is based on the principle that media organizations should be plural and subject to social controls. Yet the deep crisis of the institutions of public broadcasting today also points to problems with this model. On crucial issues like those of war and peace, climate justice, and property and ownership, both private and public media outlets exhibit massive homogeneity. The squandering of resources on managers and entertainment sectors is an additional problem. These objections notwithstanding, it remains the case that instead of private media corporations, we need radically democratic media that are publicly owned and work together closely with citizens' initiatives and movements.

New platform technologies could make a positive contribution to the expansion of political rights if they were freed from their current role of directing attention towards advertising. They could contribute to democratic will-formation and promote participation in the decision-making and planning processes of society. As early as 1930, Bertolt Brecht devoted part of his radio theory to the suggestion of a kind of radio that would not just broadcast transmissions but also receive them, allowing listeners the opportunity to transform the "broadcasting" agency.

"Radio should be transformed from an apparatus of distribution into an apparatus of communication," wrote the author and dramatist. "Radio could conceivably be the most impressive communication apparatus of all of public life, a gigantic system of channels, if only it was capable not of sending transmissions, but also of receiving them, leading the listener to not only listen, but also speak, not isolating him but putting him in relation to others. In this way, radio would cease to be a supplier, instead organizing listeners as suppliers." (Brecht 1989)

The Brechtian principle could serve as a vision for organizing the press and the media. Their democratization would contribute to the artistic

and cultural enrichment of society in two senses of the word, while also magnifying the influence of art and culture.

2 THE MATERIAL SIDE OF FREEDOM: PROVIDING FOR FUNDAMENTAL NEEDS

Only those who live without fear enjoy the freedom to shape their own lives. That means that the individual's access to decent housing, good food, health, education, and cultural and social participation must be socially guaranteed.

Numerous constitutions and the Charter of the UN declare this right to material security, but in practice the promise goes unfulfilled for a majority of the world population. The main reason for this lies in massive social inequality: taken together, the five richest men in the world possess private wealth of almost 1 trillion US dollars, with around 122 billion now being added per year. According to calculations by Oxfam, it would take 23 billion dollars per year to eradicate hunger and malnutrition worldwide. In other words, the private wealth of just a handful of the super-rich would easily suffice to meet the needs for food, drinking water, and housing of the world's population.

But the problem is even more serious than that. In recent years, public education and healthcare systems practically all over the world have been opened up to capital and commodified. In this case, the capitalist land grab takes the form of a rollback: important achievements reached through social struggles are reversed in order to facilitate the accumulation of capital.

In this context, socialism means defending and extending public systems that ensure that people's fundamental material needs are met. Not only the education and healthcare systems, but the provision of housing, transport, energy, and communication networks ought to be publicly owned. This is why we also speak of *infrastructure socialism.* Providing for basic needs facilitates material and social participation and is therefore a cornerstone of personal freedom.

Yet infrastructure socialism is not the same as nationalization. The decisive difference between the socialization that we propose and traditional nationalization consists in the democratization of public infrastructure. The struggle to bring housing in Berlin under common ownership that

was set in motion by the Expropriate Deutsche Wohnen & Co. campaign is a good example of where and how socialist politics can begin. The point of the referendum in Berlin was not just to socialize housing. Rather, it was about bringing property under public ownership and democratizing control over housing. The demand was that publicly owned property be administered by supervisory councils elected by tenants. That is precisely the essence of socialism: a democratic economy of public and commons goods.

In their 2020 book *Die Service-public-Revolution,* the co-chair of Switzerland's Social Democratic Party, Cédric Wermuth, and long-time trade union secretary Beat Ringger defend the thesis that the construction of public systems that supply people's fundamental material needs should be understood as a starting point for a socialist politics of socialization. The point is not only to defend public structures like hospitals, the water supply, railways, public transport, or schools against privatization, but also to understand them as empirical demonstrations of how a non-profit, democratically controlled economy could work. Public sector infrastructure already facilitates a partially secure mode of life for broad segments of the population, since there is also a large part of the middle class that could hardly afford to participate in private education and healthcare systems. At the same time, this public service infrastructure can be much more readily reconciled with the circular regional economies that both ecological and social considerations make necessary. From this perspective, infrastructure of this kind could be conceived as having a bridging function: if the water supply is efficiently organized in the form of a public, democratically administered enterprise, there is no reason why the same would not also work for the provision of consumer goods. In this sense, the way that public services operate provides a blueprint for a democratic socialization of industries and service companies.

As an example, Ringger and Wermuth point to the Dutch non-profit organization Buurtzorg, which was founded in 2006 by carer Jos de Blok out of dissatisfaction with traditional, hierarchical forms of organizing nursing services. Just a few years saw the emergence of a self-managed enterprise with 14,000 staff dedicated to the public good and united under the slogan "carers don't need managers, they need each other". The organization plans the services it provides in cooperation with those in need of support and their loved ones. Firms of this kind run by those who work in them are examples of how the advancement of democratic socialization can also have its origins in work processes.

3 OVERCOMING EVERY KIND OF EXPLOITATIVE AND OPPRESSIVE RELATION

It should be self-evident for the socialist movement that it must take up and defend the demands of anti-racist, feminist, and queer movements. Liberation is only possible as a project for mutual, plural, and universal emancipation of all who are oppressed.

The history of capitalism as racial capitalism is inextricably linked to colonial violence, slavery, and racist super-exploitation. Without the violent appropriation of the unpaid labour of enslaved people and without the racist division of the lower classes, Western modernity would never have been established. The same goes for the relationships between capitalism and patriarchy. Value-creation in productive labour depends on care work being appropriated without pay. Defined as "feminine", this labour is naturalized and imposed on women through a set of gendered power relations.

Capitalism is thus always founded on a double kind of exploitation: the appropriation of surplus value in regular wage labour relationships and the appropriation of unpaid or super-exploited labour. It is true that there are strands of feminism and anti-racism that pursue identity politics, ultimately demanding an individualized form of participation by women and Black people in the existing system. But alongside those tendencies, there is a feminist and anti-racist materialism that draws attention to a major omission on the part of the socialist movement. When unpaid labour is appropriated in the context of sexist or colonial relationships or super-exploited in the context of racist conditions, class relationships are gendered and racialized. This kind of super-exploitation, which also reveals itself in neo-colonial and imperialist relations between countries, lies at the heart of capitalist power.

For the socialist movement, changing the relationships *between* genders and our ideas about genders are therefore also an essential component of the emancipatory project. Wage labour and unpaid reproductive labour must be redistributed, and gendered lines of division removed.

The same goes for racism, which is a tool that excuses capitalist dehumanization and is inextricably connected with the history of class domination. For us, part of the fight against racial capitalism also lies in resistance to the state border regime and attacks on migration, which we understand as means of class division.

Materialist theories of intersectional feminism and anti-racism reveal how various oppressive conditions are interlinked. This means that feminist and anti-racist movements make indispensable contributions to the further development of an emancipatory socialist project.

4 A FUNDAMENTALLY NEW RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SOCIETY AND NATURE

The most important material challenge at present consists in enabling a good life for the global population that must also be brought into harmony with nature's reproductive cycles. A social and economic order that systematically oversteps ecological limits (as is the case with bourgeois society) will collapse at some point. A project for a socialist future must be ecological. In this sense, we need to transition to an emissions-free economy, "to a less energy-intensive form of economy on the basis of renewable and solar energy", as economist Elmar Altvater (2012) wrote several years ago.

In the twentieth century, capitalist and socialist societies were both blind to the material foundations of society. The present crisis shows that we can no longer ignore our "metabolism", meaning our interchange with nature. In this respect, Engels and Marx were more advanced than the twentieth-century Left. Engels wrote that every form of labour transforms nature, and hence intervenes in the environment. Marx studied the falling yields of English agriculture and began to speak of a "metabolic rift". He was describing the fact that the natural nutrient cycles had been interrupted by capitalism, which at that time was still relatively new. The displacement of peasants from their land and resulting urbanization had created a spatial separation between the production and consumption of food, with human excrement no longer returning to the soil as fertilizer. The disappearance of this natural fertilizer caused crop yields to fall. In this way, a social process — the privatization of the agricultural commons by the nobility, the dispossession of the rural poor, urbanization, and industrialization — gave rise to an ecological crisis that backfired on society, putting its continued existence at risk.

For Marx, this observation results in a consequence that has become highly relevant again today: every mode of producing and living has its material limits in the cycles of the reproduction of nature. Ecological cycles are the foundation of social and economic structures. In other words: a society of seafarers who use more wood in building ships than can regrow, will at some point no longer be able to travel the seas.

Today, capitalism faces the problem that it does not only overstep local or regional material limits, as human civilizations already did in the past, but instead oversteps those limits on a planetary scale. The present ecological crisis has long been about more than just climate change: according to recent studies, of nine "planetary limits", six have been reached. Besides global warming, these are species extinction, land use, the disturbance of biogeochemical cycles, the use of fresh water, and the introduction of novel substances into the soil and the atmosphere.

That means that the metabolism of the capitalist mode of production and form of life destroys the material conditions of our collective existence and thus endangers the survival of billions of people. The issue of ecology is therefore not something that is only of interest to the "green middle classes". Natural disasters and the collapse of ecosystems put the material survival of the lower classes at risk — for example through increases in the prices of basic foodstuffs. The ecological crisis does not point towards a "collapse of nature" but rather to the deaths of billions of those without property. "Climate justice" is actually a class issue.

The socialist project must therefore limit the metabolism with nature. Processes of production and consumption should not use more than will grow back or can be recycled.

5 TRANSFORMING THE ECONOMY INTO ONE THAT IS EMISSIONS-FREE AND SERVES PEOPLE'S NEEDS

The mode of production that dominates today is based on the principle that costs will be systematically "externalized" — borne by the Global South or future generations; the mode of production must therefore be radically transformed. Global value chains, with their energy-intensive transport routes, must be replaced by circular regional economies. Instead of a short-term focus on increasing the quantity of consumer and industrial goods, we need an economy based on the use of durable, repairable goods, sustainable mobility, and housing and living arrangements that conserve resources. This industrial transformation must be organized together with workers; it cannot be implemented without their participation.

Our mode of producing and living is based on a continuous externalization of social and ecological harms. Most consumer goods are cheap because the market ignores a large part of the costs: the harms caused by climate

change and pollution really only register at a later date; the extraction of minerals poisons drinking water in remote regions of the Global South that are inhabited by people who have no say in the international power structure.

For this reason, there is no alternative to the transformation of production processes. We need a left-wing industrial policy that develops zero-emissions production processes, is based on the principle of circular regional economies, and creates ecologically sustainable mobility and transport systems. But this transformation will only succeed if the social security and democratic participation of employees are simultaneously guaranteed. An ecological conversion under neoliberal, profit-oriented leadership will fail, since it will provoke not only the resistance of capital's old fossil-fuel factions but also of workers.

In 1970s, UK armaments industry workers initiated a debate on how they could transform their workplaces to serve the provision of peaceful, needs-based goods. Considering today's ecological challenges, we need a comparable debate over conversion today: workers' concerns and knowledge must play a central role.

In the industrialized societies of the West, and now also in China, the conversion of the automotive industry into a sustainable mobility industry is both a core task and emblematic of the social-ecological transformation. The continued mass production of cars devours resources, lithium mining is enormously harmful to nature and to human beings, and car traffic is suffocating cities and built-up areas. Two thirds of all public surface area in cities and municipalities are claimed by cars — space that a warming climate means we urgently need for green areas and bodies of water.

The conversion of the auto industry into an industry for sustainable mobility is not only an economic challenge, it also requires a cultural break. In the industrialized countries, car, and home ownership represent capitalism's biggest promises of freedom and prosperity. Marx once described this kind of exaltation of goods as commodity fetishism, as a quasi-religious, reifying relationship to products. But while the car is deeply rooted in social consciousness, individual mass transport cannot be the principal focus of future mobility, whether here or internationally. What we need instead are foot and bicycle traffic, well-developed public transport networks, and trains that operate efficiently for passengers and goods. The conversion of the auto industry enabling a shift away from the production of cars and towards railway components, electrical buses

and vans, trams, and digital infrastructure would show the way for up- and downstream industries, but also for the chemicals industry, the food industry, and mechanical engineering.

At the same time, this project must be radically internationalist. The interests of people affected by the negative effects of mining in the Global South must be taken account of no less than those of workers who are threatened by plant closures in this country. When ecological changes make resources more scarce and more expensive, their use must be globally planned and organized equitably. The imperialist process of the extractive plunder of raw materials and minerals must be ended through a comprehensive decolonization of the relationships of trade and exchange. This also involves technology transfers that will enable societies of the Global South to participate in the industrial transformation and put them in a position to "skip" fossil capitalism.

6 FINANCIAL SERVICES IN PUBLIC AND COMMUNITY OWNERSHIP

The goal of the socialist movement is a society without commodity or money relationships, yet for such a way of living together to eventuate, many preconditions would have to be met. For as long as there are multiple separate owners who negotiate with one another, money will be necessary. By contrast with today, the provision of financial means should not be a for-profit business on the part of monopoly banks and investment funds. The speculative financial sector must be replaced by public provision of money by means of democratic, self-managed municipal or mutual savings banks.

Speculative and financial bubbles regularly burst, plunging the world population into deep material distress. Banks and investment funds have become so large that their bankruptcies, as most recently in 2008, lead to a collapse of the global economy and the necessity of publicly funded bailouts that run into the trillions. If the finance sector has taken on a life of its own, this is a logical consequence of capitalist commodity relations, but also the ultimate expression of the irrationality they embody.

To defuse this ticking time-bomb we need a socialized, not-for-profit financial system. It is true that in the recent past, government-owned state banks and savings associations have played an ignominious role in financial crashes, but this was a result of the fact that management at

the banks in question had participated in highly risky speculative deals on international markets. Instead of this, we need a financial sector that is democratically controlled and oriented towards the common good. Ringger and Wermuth (2020: 130) provide a sketch of how such a public financial system could be constructed, beginning with a citation from a 2010 paper by left-wing think-tank Denknetz:

"Financial services are provided by institutions for which the form "public service financial services organization" (SPF) is created. Both government-owned providers and mutual associations can qualify to be licensed as an SPF. SPFs refrain from dealing on their own behalf or dealing in risky securities, stocks, or bonds. The political system regularly defines which stocks are prohibited in this sense. The business dealings of an SPF are subject to public supervision..."

As Ringger and Wermuth go on to explain (2020: 131), only these new financial providers are to receive licenses for monetary transactions:

"All other financial institutions are obliged to transact their payments via an SPF. The state-guaranteed investment protection for smaller deposits (e.g. up to 200,000 Swiss francs) will henceforth be granted only to SPF institutions. … SPFs provide credit and can, for example, take on the role of a climate bank."

7 A NEW MODEL OF PROSPERITY: THE GOOD LIFE

Socialism as we understand it is based on a new understanding of what constitutes the good life: a conception of prosperity that begins not from the idea of maximized consumption but from the adequate provision for our basic needs, comprehensive social infrastructure, and a significant reduction in working time during the week and across people's lifetimes, giving people control over their lives again.

There is hardly any concept that the bourgeois parties use in a more inflationary way than that of prosperity. Policy is supposedly always aimed at ensuring and increasing prosperity. But in reality, the society in which we live today is shaped by the needs of capital: mass production, mass products, the consumption of rapidly deteriorating goods, etc. The good life is defined as that which is necessary for capitalism to keep accumulation going: working intensively in order to be able to buy intensively.

Of course, the development of the past century was not entirely bad: technological progress and mass production have made many everyday items affordable and, in part, made life easier. Who would deny that the dissemination of the washing machine has improved people's quality of life (particularly that of women, to whom the patriarchal division of labour assigned responsibility for the washing)?

But the modes of production and life in Fordist societies have long been overtaken by the fact that they systematically displace their costs outwards and into the future. We are now beginning to bear the full brunt of this "externalization", as Elmar Altvater has termed it. The accumulated greenhouse gas emissions of 200 years are causing cities to sink into the ocean, while the comforts of car-based mobility are — via fine particulate matter and microplastics abraded from tyres — causing us deadly cardiovascular diseases.

The implication is that socialism cannot do what it did in the twentieth century and take inspiration from capitalist models of production and consumption. Rather, we need our own, alternative understanding of the good life. The core idea should be that we have more time for our social life, leisure, and creativity. The conditions for this have existed for a long time. For example, around a century ago, renowned social-liberal economist John M. Keynes predicted that growing labour productivity would lead by 2030 to working week of 15 hours! Instead of working ourselves to death for consumer goods and status objects, we should fight for autonomy in determining the use of our time.

The goal must be a society in which people are able to experience recognition and develop themselves in ways that go beyond wage labour and conspicuous consumption. Hence we are also convinced that the socialist movement needs to return to its tradition of being a movement of resistance, both as culture and as education. The old workers' movement aspired towards a cultural horizon of its own, towards its own forms of sociality and its own goals. These are now more important than ever: as against capital's stunted visions, we need to develop our own conceptions of what the good, pleasurable, and socially rich life could look like.

8 AN ECONOMY THAT PUTS LIFE FIRST

Capitalism ignores natural metabolic cycles, systematically masks the reproductive foundations of human existence, and thus "can-

nibalizes" (Nancy Fraser) itself. A socialist project must therefore redefine the concept of the economy.

In the twentieth century, economic success — both in capitalism and in socialism — was measured by rates of growth. Neither the ecological consequences nor the organization of social reproduction were registered by economics, nor were they considered parameters of a successful economic system.

A socialist economy is only an alternative if it aims at an ecological "sustainability revolution" (Klaus Dörre) and "puts life first", to cite a phrase that feminist movements (cf. Herreras et al. 2019) have used — that is, if it considers not only productivity but especially also care, in the sense of the reproduction of human and non-human life.

Among the most important achievements of the Russian Revolution is the fact that in the first few years after 1917, feminists such as Alexandra Kollontai were able to establish public institutions of care. Crèches and communal kitchens were instituted, housework was recognized as a social task, and women at least began to be liberated from a one-sided distribution of the burden of housework and reproductive labour.

By now, even capitalism under neoliberal modernization has discovered what it calls the care sector. But institutions of care are not run in the common interest, but in the interests of profit. They are transformed into a department of business, where people, overwhelmingly women and mostly migrants, work under pitiful conditions. Meanwhile, the quality of care in hospitals, kindergartens, and facilities for the elderly has tended to worsen. In this regard, too, capitalism is oblivious to the foundations of its own social existence.

The socialist movement fights to have care work redistributed and organized according to the common good. Facilities for children, the ill, those who depend on care, and elders belong in public or community ownership. The people employed in them should be able to work under good conditions and be well remunerated.

At the same time, it is imperative to redistribute reproductive activities as between the genders. In this regard, two decades ago socialist feminist Frigga Haug (2008) spoke about a "four-in-one perspective". Waged work, interpersonal care work, socio-political engagement, and self-development should be understood as equally important areas of activity, and all human

beings should take responsibility to an equal degree in all of these areas and have equal opportunities for self-realization. The conditions for this lie in the development of a public infrastructure of care, the redistribution of wealth and work, and a feminist transformation of our everyday behaviour.

In our view, an "economy that puts life first" must proceed towards a five-fold goal: 1) the provision to all human beings — meaning globally, irrespective of the framework of the nation-state — of the goods they need to meet their everyday needs; 2) the establishment of public infrastructure that guarantees comprehensive social security and participation in social life; this infrastructure should also not be conceived according to nation-state limits, rather the goal must be to expand existing international institutions for health and education to form effective global infrastructure; 3) the sustainability of the mode of production and life, meaning the alignment of economic and social processes with the reproductive cycles of the environment and the "earth system" (i.e. the sum total of physical, chemical, biological and social processes and interactions on this planet); 4) a redistribution of work and wealth that abolishes the subordination of the reproductive to the productive domain and provides everyone the possibility of self-realization; this includes a universal entitlement to meaningful and satisfying work, a universal right to leisure, and universally shared responsibility for care activities; 5) putting practices of solidarity and cooperative relationships before logics of competition — not merely within existing communities but across ethnic, national, and religious lines.

9 ECOLOGICAL AND DEMOCRATIC ECONOMIC PLANNING

We need a transformation of the economy and society with the goal of satisfying human needs and ceasing to systematically ignore ecological limits. A transformational process of this extent must proceed in a planned way. By contrast with state socialism, however, this planning cannot be authoritarian and bureaucratic, but must be organized in a radically democratic way. From this perspective, socialist planning means that society works together to develop its economic and social objectives.

In capitalism, all social processes follow one single principle: market actors' interest in turning a profit. Competition between individual enterprises generates an enormous dynamism; in the past it promoted

rapid development of the markets in consumer and investment products. But for several decades now this same dynamic has had increasingly destructive effects. The growth imperative is destroying the material foundations of our existence, and with financialization the economy's dynamism has increasingly shifted into speculative domains that do not produce use-values but simply redistribute existing wealth.

In this context, a planned reconstruction of the economy has become a vital necessity. Yet planning should not be understood as an extension of state power. Rather, at issue is a discursive process (deliberation, participation, public discussion) in which society comes together to develop its goals and pursues them in a coordinated way. As discussed under point 8, above, it is definitely possible to sketch in a general way what the objectives of a post-capitalist society would need to look like. The provision of basic goods and social infrastructure to all human beings, the limiting of emissions and the use of resources to sustainable levels, the redistribution of labour and wealth, and the strengthening of relationships of solidarity would all be key aspects of a new economy that was no longer focused on profit.

When it comes to implementing these sorts of overarching goals, however, there is a good deal of potential for conflict. Which consumer needs are necessary, which are superfluous? Which sectors of the economy should shrink, what is to happen with the people employed in them, and which sectors need to grow rapidly? And how should the new ecological problems that result from that be handled? What we do we actually mean when we speak of solidarity and cooperation?

Those are just a few questions among the many that would arise in the course of a planning process. These kinds of controversies require strong deliberative procedures. We call this conflictual process of deliberation (which has little in common with the centralized procedures in really existing socialism) *democratic planning.*

In this context, we should recall that planning as such is not an instrument capable of overcoming capitalism or class rule. The "free market" is also subject to continual planning: governments and organizations such as the International Energy Agency or the International Monetary Fund concern themselves with the supply of raw materials, the provision of energy, or the ability of debtor countries to meet their financial obligations. And, thanks to technological developments, major corporations such as Amazon and Ikea have achieved a sophistication in their planning of which

socialist countries in the twentieth century could have only dreamed. The question is not whether planning is to take place, but how and to what end: in an authoritarian or a democratic manner, in the interests of shareholders or of the majority of the population?

But even if we are able to name the basic differences between democratic and capitalist planning, there are key problems pertaining to a democratically planned economy that are unable to be answered from today's perspective. The workers at an industrial plant and the people who live next to the plant, for example, will also pursue different interests under a system of common property, and these interests will have to be weighed against each other. Thus a planned socialist economy is by no means — and notwithstanding the assumptions of many twentieth-century leftists — a harmonious process. Rather, the aim must be to develop democratic instruments that make it possible to settle conflicts between different interests.

Workplace democracy within economic units, but also the establishment of "transformation councils", as suggested by Jena sociologist Klaus Dörre in view of the social-ecological crisis, could provide direction here. We understand planning as a democratic process in which groups and civil society representatives (trade unions, environmental organizations, local inhabitants, consumers, etc.) work together at different levels (local, regional, national) to resolve issues relating to economic and social development.

10 A SOCIAL ECONOMY WITH A VARIETY OF PROPERTY FORMS

Socialism is a democratic social economy, in which society decides collectively on social goals. But to avoid everything falling into the hands of an all-powerful state, multiple forms of — collective, but also individual — property and rights to use will coexist. How these different forms of property enter into relationship with one another and what role market relations will play, can only be decided on in the course of the social process.

After the revolution of 1918, the left-wing theoretician Karl Korsch discussed the at that time very concrete question of how, in addition to the political system, the economy, too, could be democratized. Just as the political power of government had been wrenched away from the

aristocracy, the idea was that enterprises would be liberated from the exclusive control of their owners. Korsch (1919) wrote: "The goal of socialization in a socialist spirit, however, is neither consumer-capitalism nor producer-capitalism, but truly common property for the totality of producers and consumers."

What does this mean? In his essay, Korsch was countering the assumption, popular in the SPD at that time, that a society could acquire control over the economy merely by means of industrial relations and social security legislation. According to Korsch, that kind of encroachment on "the privileges *(Befugnisse)* of private property owners" is mere social policy. But Korsch also thought that the two other approaches that were being discussed at the time were insufficient. The transfer of enterprises into municipal or national ownership, Korsch argued, would only lead to a kind of "consumer-capitalism". Viewed from the standpoint of the worker, the old owner would merely be replaced by a state bureaucracy, which (in the best case scenario) would act in the interests of the population as a whole considered as *consumers*. But according to Korsch, this would not amount to socialization but merely to a change of ownership. And indeed, in the socialist states this "change of owner" would in fact soon reveal itself to be a problem: production facilities belonged to the state and workers in socialist factories experienced their work to be as alienating as those working in capitalist enterprises.

But the transformation of enterprises into units managed by the workers themselves was not a solution for Korsch either. In this case, the result was "producer-capitalism", where the self-managed enterprises would primarily pursue their own interests, but not those of the society as a whole.

Thus, in 1919 Korsch had already seen that 1) nationalization is not identical with socialization and maintains conditions of heteronomy (the subordination of workers to management in an enterprise), and that 2) self-managed enterprises and cooperatives follow their own particular interests and thus preserve relationships between enterprises defined by the exchange of commodities. Neither state property nor worker self-management amount to socialism.

From this, Korsch concluded that socialization is a process of democratization and that the economy would have to be transformed in a way analogous to the transformation of the political system in 1918. Just as representatives are elected in particular territories to make political decisions, all the workers in a sector could elect an economic council

that would lead and coordinate production in that sector. Private property would be replaced by publicly or cooperatively owned property, company management would be replaced by managers elected by workers, the market would be replaced by an economic council, also elected, that would coordinate economic relations between enterprises.

Korsch sketched a form of socialization where it would not have been possible for a state bureaucracy to take over exclusive control. Various forms of common property, the self-management of enterprises, and a democratically elected management of economic domains were intended to set in motion a process that would enable society to gain control over work and economic life.

Korsch was less interested in finished models than in actual social processes. For example, in his opinion all three routes — a) the transfer of sectors of production into state or municipal ownership, b) the voluntary association of individuals to form cooperatives, and c) the deepening of worker participation in private enterprises through collective bargaining agreements and participation in decision-making (both still novelties at that time) — would have to be followed at the same time. For Korsch, the socialist approach to socialization was thus a democratic process in which public property and the self-management and the participation of workers in existing private enterprises would develop in parallel.

Although our present situation has little to do with the realities of 1918–19, Korsch's fundamental idea remains acutely relevant: *socialization is the strengthening of common property plus the democratization of economic life.* Common property can take on a large variety of forms. Depending on the particular context, the most suitable form of collective property might be a municipal enterprise, a public law institution, a cooperative, a state enterprise, or a self-organized commons-based system such as those traditionally practised in peasant communities and today also seen in digital peer-to-peer communities (the free software movement).

Thus, socialism combines democratic self-management at the workplace with the social supervision and control of the economy and the desire for individual self-development, and involves balancing interests that may at times collide.

Again, socialism cannot be a harmonious social order, as twentieth-century leftists assumed it would be. On the contrary, a society that deliberates collectively on the means and goals of work, production, consumption,

and reproduction will be continually obliged to work through conflicts. As in the domain of politics, this requires a vital democracy in which dissent and critique are valued.

11 NEW RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN THE MARKET AND PLANNING AND BETWEEN VARIOUS FORMS OF PROPERTY

Solidarity and a sense of social responsibility cannot be decreed, but they can be fostered. The overcoming of commodity relationships and competition, such as would be characteristic of true socialization, is more of a social learning process than a political act. Socialist politics can establish conditions under which democratic socialization can thrive. But it cannot simply enact socialization.

If it is true that there are different forms of democratic property (and not just state property), the question arises of how enterprises, manufacturing plants, service provides, etc., can enter into exchange relations with one another. We are habituated to thinking that this can only take place through markets and competition. But even in capitalism that isn't true: even in capitalism, as a rule, the various departments of a single enterprise do not maintain market relations with one another. A given production facility A delivers a certain quantity of goods to site B because management ordered it to. As long as both sites belong to the same owner, there's no problem. Within firms, even in capitalism, a kind of common sense seems to go without saying (even if it has been undermined by the advent and spread of the "profit centre", now common within enterprises).

Why is that? Why do we consider cooperation inside the Siemens or VW "family" to be sensible, while being unable to imagine similar forms of collaboration between a municipal enterprise, a cooperative, and a family bakery in a small town?

To this, the aforementioned Karl Korsch proposed the following response: the introduction of different forms of common property is only the first step. The second step — towards a society in which each contributes "according to their ability" and receives "according to their needs" — depends, he argued, on the emergence of a strong sense of community spirit, because where relationships are characterized by solidarity and amicability, there is no expectation of immediate reciprocation.

However, a community spirit of that kind cannot be simply decreed. It is not a matter of economic policy, as Korsch says, but has to grow as part of a cultural process. As long as it does not, he continues, the individualist principle will continue to operate. However, under conditions of common property it will be much better able to develop its positive effects as compared with under capitalism, where freedom of enterprise remains a privilege of capitalists.

US feminist socialist Nancy Fraser elaborates on similar considerations (2023: 155 f.):

"No markets at the top, no markets at the bottom, but possibly some markets in the in-between. … [As] truly collective property, surplus must be allocated via collective processes of decision making and planning — planning that can and must be organized democratically. Market mechanisms should play no role at this level. The rule here is neither markets nor private property at the top."

And also "at the bottom", at the level of the satisfaction of fundamental needs such as shelter, clothing, food, education, health care, transportation, energy, leisure, etc., there is no role for markets, since a socialist society, Fraser argues, treats goods that satisfy basic needs as public.

But in between, Fraser suggests, there could certainly be markets:

"Socialists should imagine the in-between as a space for experimentation with a mix of different possibilities: a space where markets could find a place, along with cooperatives, commons, self-organized associations, and self-managed projects." (Ibid.: 156)

We must therefore conclude that the question of how much market logic and self-interest is to exist and perhaps continue, over the longer term, to be viewed by society as sensible, will have to be answered by those these arrangements will one day affect. Socialism is not a model that can be imposed on society. But we should mention that even in capitalism the pursuit of individual advantage is by no means the decisive source of motivation for many people, and hence that non-commodified relationships of exchange are already regularly practised today: the online encyclopaedia Wikipedia, free software such as Linux, community gardens and many other projects that are oriented towards the common good are constructed, maintained, and cared for by volunteers. The people

that work in these domains do so because of their interest, not monetary incentives. And most work, in particular most forms of reproductive care work in the private sphere, is in any case done outside the market. The question is not whether an economy beyond market competition is imaginable, but how much space a society wants to concede to markets.

12 A GLOBAL, UNIVERSAL, AND ANTI-MILITARIST MOVEMENT

Socialism is a project of universal emancipation; it strives for the dissolution of nation-state and ethnic boundaries, just as abolitionist and feminist movements do. We can only speak of equality and solidarity if they are enjoyed by all people in common. Our goal is therefore not simply the overcoming of class society within state borders, but also the abolition of imperialist and neo-colonialist relationships of inequality and exploitation between North and South.

From our perspective, it is no less important to recognize that socialists have nothing to win in the wars waged by nation states. We hold to the proclamation that democratic socialist parliamentarian Wilhelm Liebknecht made in 1887: "Social democracy can just as little be reconciled to militarism, which is a necessary outgrowth of the reigning system of the state and society, as with that system itself. … To militarism we will cede not a man and not a penny!"

Capitalism has its historical roots in the bloody colonization of the South and in mass enslavement. Even after the end of the old colonial regime, capitalism systematically continued this exploitation, producing not only an economic world system, but international class relationships. With continued expropriation and exploitation, people are first stripped of their ability to live from their subsistence practices, and then forced to participate in a system that has no place for them.

Under capitalism, inequality is always hierarchized and at the same time entangled: within societies there are gendered and racialized class relationships, and between societies there are national relationships of exploitation. Thus, the industrial countries of the North use around seven tenths of the global resources, although only about a fifth of the world's population lives in them. At the same time, the Global South — in the form of illegalized workers — also exists, however, inside the Global North, and the Global North is also present in the South in the shape of

economic elites. Every emancipatory project has to fight both of these relationships of inequality (between classes and between societies) simultaneously. Considering the globalized dimension of capitalism, a socialism bounded by national borders ought not to be; but given the international intertwinements of capital, "socialism in one country" is also simply not possible.

Yet at the same time, it's obvious that improvements must be fought for within existing institutional frameworks. Since these institutions are necessarily organized by or around the nation-state — the European Union representing not an overcoming but a territorial extension of the nation-state model — our struggles always also aim at changes within existing borders.

To at least begin to overcome this contradiction, it is essential that a socialist politics formulate reforms that tackle relationships of inequality and oppression between centre and periphery and seek to establish a new global economic order based on solidarity. The financing of an international fund for dealing with the consequences of climate change, the strengthening of multilateral structures in healthcare and food security (the objectives that originally inspired the founding of the UN's World Health Organization and Food and Agriculture Organization), the fight against the racist migration regime, and supply chain laws that improve the conditions under which unions are able to organize in the Global South: these all show how it is possible to start from politics at the national level and develop an emancipatory project with an internationalist dimension.

Ultimately, our internationalism also implies the conviction that socialists have no business getting involved in wars between states. Resistance against military occupation may be legitimate or even unavoidable (which, in that case, would go no less for the Palestinian territories as for Ukraine, and vice-versa). But in the twentieth century, more than one "war of national liberation" showed that the emancipatory potential of the form is limited.

That applies even more obviously to wars between state armies. In our opinion, freedom is not something that can be conquered with artillery fire, fighter jets, and drone warfare, but instead is only achieved by the resistance of an organized population. All developments that promote militarism and military logics in our societies block the route to the emancipation that we as socialists are striving for.

13 SOCIALISM: RESOLUTELY ANTI-FASCIST

Liberalism cannot be relied upon to stop fascism. Only a movement that fights capital, with its logics of exploitation and exclusion, can curb the far right. Socialism stands for global social rights and infrastructure, which promise all human beings the opportunity to live a good life.

In contemporary political discourse, fascism is commonly understood as a break with mainstream liberal political conditions, but the fact is that it actually tends to represent their intensification. Fascist tendencies have always accompanied the society of liberalism: in European colonial regimes or the settler colonialism of the early US, the ideology of "racial superiority" was accompanied by genocidal violence; on the mother continent with its European democracies, the bourgeoisie of the eighteenth and nineteenth century forced anyone who was poor and unwilling or unable to work into workhouses that were hardly less cruel than fascist camps. And as far as the idea of social Darwinism ("survival of the fittest"), the idealization of "self-made elites", or the glorification of competition between nation-states go, liberalism and fascism are much closer than often supposed. It should come as little surprise, therefore, that while the Nazi Party labelled itself a "Socialist Workers' Party", it gathered its voters primarily from wealthier conservative and national-liberal circles (and not from the areas where workers lived).

The latest fascist movement, too, is closely linked with the liberal politics of recent decades. Neoliberalism has established a climate of general insecurity in which an atmosphere of civil war has taken hold in many people's minds. If resources are becoming more scarce due to ecological destruction and national competition, one has to conquer them with military might — thus the absurd logic of the right.

If the Left wishes to put a stop to this development, it must indicate a path to real security, meaning not the "security" of militarized policing and surveillance apparatuses, but that of basic social services for everyone. If natural disasters are multiplying, we need global social security systems that will support those affected. If infrastructure is decaying, we need a redistribution of wealth from private to public, and investment in just this infrastructure.

Socialism stands for a future worth fighting for. It is a movement that defends global social rights rather than charity, and practices democracy

rather than authoritarianism. It creates infrastructure to meet fundamental material needs and counters nationalist and racist delusions, which sooner or later lead to war, with a perspective rooted in solidarity. Faced with global crises, it puts forward global solutions; faced with growing insecurity, it fights for systems of social security that do not stop at the national border. Against the poison of nationalism and "race war", there is only one antidote: social rights and internationalist solidarity.

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