

Freedom and socialism – let's make it real!

Emancipative thought impulses for the new Left Party by Julia Bonk, Katja Kipping, and Caren Lay

It is time to get on paper our ideas for an emancipative Left. We want to contribute in this way to the debate on the orientation of the new Left Party. This new party foundation process takes place before the background of concrete social confrontations that are accompanied by value discussions on the ideological field. In last few years, reforms under different names have been used to push ahead with social demolition, wage dumping, privatisation of public property and redistribution from below to the top. Under the call for imaginary freedom and individual responsibility, there were driven forward the undermining of solidarity and the privatisation of individual risks. Especially those are threatened by these risks who are oppressed by the freedom of the strong. Against this development, we want to pose a left counter-point. It is clear: the process of finding itself of a New Left is an important step in order to influence the course of these confrontations. In that context, it cannot only be a case of defensively defending the status quo. We want to bring into this party re-founding process approaches of emancipatory thinking that are already essential components of the programme of the Left Party.

We are concerned with establishing freedom and self-determination as well as solidarity as fundamental motives of left politics. Therefore, our understanding of freedom distinguishes itself fundamentally from the distorted image of freedom that economic lobbyists and their believers draw in politics. To us freedom does not mean the freedom of the strong to exploit the weak. Freedom and self-determination are not redeemable or only in part without social security. The free unfolding of the individuality of each and everyone requires universal social rights and rights of participation. To that extent we want to change the existing economic relationships of power – and in a fundamental way. The Left must fight therefore both for the common disposal over means of production as well as for the power of disposition over our own lives. The approach and the objective of our emancipative thinking is freedom from social repression and the freedom to be able to choose a concept of life oneself and to fashion it. This we want to enter at all levels and into all areas of politics.

When we pick up the notion of “emancipatory left”, we do not think of a group that one signs on to or an additional current that is supposed to continue with the conflict between imagined “realists” and “fundamentalists” – a conflict along whose lines we do not recognise ourselves and that we also think is dated. It is rather a matter of a common basis for a pluralist, left party. A common basis is necessary in order not to make difference usher in whatever you like and in self-destruction. Such a basis can only come out of commonly accepted foundations. The programme of the Left Party must make an important contribution to the substantive orientation of the New Left.

An emancipatory left, if it takes itself seriously, may not only announce its theoretical foundation. It must apply its principles also to the solution of concrete problems. Emancipative politics aims at the concrete world, but it has the courage to think of another world and to work towards it with its transformation projects. The unity between protest, active politics and alternatives pointing beyond capitalism is a necessity already described in the “strategic triangle”.

An emancipative left in its methods may not deviate from its values as this is already noted in the programme of the Left Party. Nobody can be emancipated by others, only everyone him- or herself /only we ourselves can do that. Emancipative politics must make this happen.

State and politics must remain capable of action in the sense of the public interest. Therefore, we are struggling for the maintenance and the extension of public existential provision and against the progressive privatisation of existential provision. We oppose the power of entrepreneurial associations, who want to turn our whole lives into merchandise, with a revitalisation of the political.

The question for an alternative to capitalism and to unfree relationships is answered in different ways by socialists (women and men). Our answer is not unanimous and it won't be and it also should never be unanimous. A new Left Party must recognise the plurality of its approaches and

traditions among which the worker's movement is an important one, but not the only one. Next to it, there are other left movements who fight for emancipation: for emancipation from racist or sexist oppression, for the abolition of discrimination on the basis of handicap or sexual orientation, movements who talk about new questions of justice, or as the new Left of the 70s has done, struggle for freedom from state and authoritarian repression. These experiences must be well kept in a New Left. Before this background, the history of the Left also warns us of economic shortcuts, known as the trap of the main contradiction. We refuse to decide which causes of bondage are the real or more important ones.

Yet we want to discuss what our answers have in common. For the Left Party, emancipation, understood as the free development of each and every one as the condition of the free development of all, is a key notion of its programmes. The history of the Left obligates us, however, not to take this as given. Unfortunately, all too often in the name of socialist and Communist objectives, individual freedom was only considered as secondary.

Fundamental freedoms and human rights did not have in all phases and currents of the left the prominent place that they deserve – namely a place eye to eye with social rights. To us as democratic socialists it is clear: Freedom is nothing that can be postponed or be restricted in the interests of other goals. We need equal liberty like the air for breathing. It is the sense of our commitment in politics. It is the task of a modern New Left to reconcile freedom and equality instead of falling prey to the meaningless ideology that the one is more important than the other. Freedom and equality do not exclude one another, they rather condition each other.

Similarly, the Left has no claim to be the sole representative of emancipation; enlightened liberalism as well, in contrast to neoliberalism, had some emancipation potentials. Therefore, we consider it justified to talk of an emancipatory left.

I - Criticism of unfree life

Against Capitalist Barbarity – Criticism of the existing economic relationships of power

The globalised world economy produces immense richness, never as much as today. And at the same time it produces poverty and misery. In the year 2004, 587 billionaires disposed of 1.9 billion Dollars, 500 billion Dollars more than in the year before. Most of these billionaires are US Americans; then there follow Germans and Russians. In Africa, South of the Sahara, in the year 2005, 30% of the population suffered hunger, 39% are illiterate, two-thirds have no access to sanitary installations. Misery and power in South America, Africa and Asia are in their magnitude certainly hardly comparable to poverty in Germany and the EU. Yet even within the rich countries of the North, economic differences are growing. From 2003 to 2005, the Gross Domestic Product of the FRG grew by 80.6 billion Euros, the incomes from ownership of firms or from wealth in the same period increased by 86.6 billion Euros. Workers' wages sank by 2.2 billion Euros.

The distribution of social wealth corresponding to wealth and power relations is one of the central causes for preventing a self-determined life. For one thing, the lack of crucial means for life in the poorest regions of the world lets self-determination and unfolding of individuality become secondary to the immediate need for survival. Moreover, even in the richer countries, the access to the social resources is decisive for real possibilities for enjoyment.

Compulsion to work and the crisis of work society

The world of work is changing. By the increase in productivity ever more services and products are produced by ever fewer employees. It seems paradoxical: even though ever more people are looking desperately for a job, repressions against unemployed are increasing more and more. The compulsion to pick up work functions in various ways – by way of administrative repressions as well as through social sanctions and stigmatisation as well as in fact by the tautening of financial screws. We reject every compulsion to work. The right and the freedom to be able to look for a job oneself is one of the fundamental basic rights that we must defend as Left-wingers. After all we know about the alienated character of gainful employment under capitalist conditions. Material

security is a human right. The state does not have the right to put existential security into question by way of a compulsion to work – as for instance, when people refuse to accept a 1 € job. Only if one can freely choose the activity with which to fill a large part of one's life time does one really have power of disposition over one's own life. The compulsion to work additionally weakens the negotiating position of the (potentially) employed vis-à-vis the firms. The individual man or woman should not be punished, however, for the fact that economy and politics have failed in using progress to the benefit of all.

Unemployment in this society for many represents the central problem, because appreciation, social contacts and meaning of life for most are realised primarily by way of gainful employment. We must take these needs seriously and are aware of the need to encourage, next to the more just distribution of existing gainful employment, other forms of activity and creation of meaning. Yet it is not the task of a modern Left to lapse uncritically into the chorus: "Let's make work!" It is impossible and cannot be willed-for to overcome the crisis of the Fordist work world by its resuscitation, because it would no longer correspond to the development of the productive forces. We consider it a progress if the development of the productive force can make heavy and alienated labour superfluous. Simultaneously, there develop scopes for freedom for other kinds of activity that need to be used.

The social security systems are up to now only inadequately prepared for this change in the work world. They have resulted from social struggles of the work society and orient in their services to security for gainfully employed workers and in their financing to the factor gainful employment. For non-employed women, that has already always been a poverty trap – in the light of mass unemployment, precarious work relationships and broken work biographies, the access to the social and natural resources for ever more people, who do not dispose of firms or their shares, becomes precarious for the duration. And the worse the situation of the unemployed, the more those still employed are ready to do anything to keep their job. Therefore, the power of the firms in negotiations over work conditions and work contents as well as on the level of remuneration is growing.

Repressive norm setting

Oppression carries many faces. Next to economic relationships of dependence, ways of life and norms considered as hegemonic can also act repressively against those people who do not want to follow these ideas. Insofar every attempt to establish certain life projects as the "actual" and "normal" ones serves to repress individuals below the community. Of course, there exist various rooms of normality in society; thus in a gay pub other things appear normal than in a Catholic Church community. However, some values exercise a stronger hegemony, so that other life and love patterns are still viewed with deprecating distance or respectively are openly discriminated. Social ideas of normality in our opinion should not be an unquestioned basis of left politics. On the contrary: to criticise repressive norm-setting to us is an important field for action of left politics. How people, on the basis of general human rights and recognising the freedom of those thinking differently, shape their lives does not regard the state at all. It does not have to judge different life projects. Only if that is achieved will there exist the real possibility to freely choose one's own life project with respect to loves and predilections, attitudes to gainful employment, to the consumption of illegal substances etc.

In this context, we are not only concerned with the protection of minorities. Wide sections of the population are in the meantime concerned by limiting role clichés, stigmatisation because of poverty, the experience of violence and last but not least by the introduction of forced collectives in the form of "need communities".

In the sense of the individual freedom of each and everyone, the permanent normalisation of certain life projects must be constantly questioned.

No to the authoritarian security state

The protection concept of the Basic Law aims at the protection of the women and men citizens against the state. That is a basic feature of the Basic Law. Current security policy turns this idea around: the state seems to have to be protected against its citizens. We are experiencing the

transformation of the state of law into a state of order. Despite all attempts at increasing democratisation, authoritarian elements in state and society are on the order of the day. Be it at school, in the firms, or at the state level itself: We encounter intransparent structures, hierarchical relationships of power and lack of possibilities to co-determine the shape of politics and of life worlds.

By way of the overemphasis of necessary protection against the terrorist threat, there are being justified, moreover, since September 11, 2001, various domestic political measures that restrict the freedom of citizens, women and men. In the interest of a pretence of more internal security, telephone controls and deportation are supposed to be simplified. The recording of biometrical personal data increasingly becomes reality, the employment of the Federal Army for domestic conflict management is discussed and even the demand for a reintroduction of torture is being raised. Increasingly, surveillance cameras are being installed by the public and the private hand and censuses are prepared.

The protection of the private sphere, the right to informational self-determination and the protection against force, however, are integral constituents of a democratic constitution on which a democratic and free society must be founded. Interventions into the freedom of action of citizens must be subject to the principle of proportionality and may never be "total". They must hold for all people even if they do not have German citizenship. In the discussion about more security, the safeguarding of liberty should not be neglected.

II - Central transformation processes

Of course, we do not change society over night. Yet guided by the goal of guaranteeing individual liberty as well as social solidarity in a comprehensive way, transformation projects can be described. In the light of the party re-founding process of the New Left, we can highlight those kinds of transformation projects that seem central to us, that have the potential of gradually changing society as well as the economic power relations and on which we have need for discussion.

Social security is that of the individual – parting with the breadwinner model

The future of the social security systems, which form a prerequisite for freedom and democracy, is surely one of the most important fields of action of left politics. We not only want to meet social demolition defensively, but see the best counter-strategy in the stating of alternative approaches.

The social state may not be demolished, but it must be extended. And this at the level of the times! The social security systems will hold up in the future only if they insure all women and men citizens, and if they are financed not only by way of wages but significantly more strongly by way of value creation as well as by the taxing of wealth and profits. They must take into account the dissolution of the normal working relationship.

Therefore, a democratic welfare state can no longer be concerned only with insuring those gainfully employed in situations of distress. In light of the increasing breaks in gainful employment biographies, a minimal amount of social participation in old age, in sickness or in the case of unemployment. This because a really democratic social state will guarantee all citizens the same opportunities for social participation and independently of whether it is a case of Germans or of migrants living here. The scale for social security is need and the right to a life in dignity – and not only the length of contributions.

Therefore, we stand for social security systems that are consequently thought out from an individual perspective and are based on an individual legal claim. This should, as in other European countries as well, also hold for the social, tax, and labour law. Yet up to now, the traditional distribution of roles among the sexes in form of the "breadwinner model" is the basis of our social, work and tax law. This not only constitutes a discrimination of women, it is simply no longer adequate to the actual plurality of life projects. A New Left should have the courage to part

with these old hats. They are not at the level of a New Left. Existing forms of need community and mutual claims for support in between adults represents form of compulsory socialisation that we reject just as the subsidies for the housewife marriage model by way of the spouse splitting rule. Individual claims are modern. Enforced dependencies are not.

Be active in liberty – basic income and reduction in work time

If in light of industrial and technological progress, ever fewer people can pursue traditional gainful employment, we have to think about a de-coupling of gainful employment and existence guarantee.

To guarantee the access to social resources free of repression, without bureaucratic tutelage and at a level as high as possible, without being forced to carry one's skin onto the labour market, conditions a fundamental change in the principle of distribution. Therefore, what is required is at least a social basic income without demeaning proof of need, free of repression, without compulsion to work and allowing social participation, where such a basic security should continue to be developed to become an unconditional basic income. In this way, the individual is put into a position to decide him- or herself by what activities he or she should realise him- or herself, benefit to the community and earn his or her living. Moreover, it strengthens the negotiation position of those who are forced to sell their labour power.

A basic security arranged in this way and, in the perspective, an unconditional basic income, moreover, promotes the chance to implement a general reduction in labour time, a demand that we as left people should raise in a much more offensive way. While some work longer and longer to secure their job and incomes, ever larger parts of the population are refused the access to gainful employment. Who receives a fixed sum every month and may be sure of that can afford to work less hours per week or to afford a sabbatical. Then where else would be the meaning of technical progress and gains in productivity if not in having more time for oneself, for friends and family? The promotion of solidary and self-organised forms of economic activity, for instance in the form of cooperatives, also represents an important step in achieving common power of disposition over the means of production and the democratisation of the economy.

Democracy that we mean: Extension of fundamental rights and freedoms

To us, freedom means not only the commitment to the legal state, but also the democratisation of all areas of life, including the economy. As democratic socialists we fight in a consequent manner for the improvement of the legal position of employees, consumers, patients, pupils, students, pensioners and all those who up to now had only inadequate possibilities for shaping their own life worlds.

We want not only a clear expansion of the possibilities of direct democracy, but we want to guarantee reproducibility and transparency. To that end, what is needed are comprehensive information rights for people concerning what happens in administrations and in the economy. This holds also and especially for public firms. Because we want to strengthen them, we should increase their acceptance by more transparency. True to the slogan "Public services under public control", public expenditures must be the subject of public confrontations.

Each and every one does have the right to a private sphere. The right to informational self-determination, the right for each and everyone to have access to one's own data – meaning to be able to decide who and to what extent may have insight into one's own life conditions, and who may not, and this politically as well as commercially – to us is of basic importance. At this time, this means mainly to extend the law on informational freedom (IFG) in substance and in space. We demand an extension also to data levied by the secret services and want to oblige all regions to implement this law also at the regional level. Moreover, the cost freeness of this claim to informational self-determination must be guaranteed.

To strengthen human rights to us means to recognise and to claim their indivisibility. To emancipatory left-wingers, three elements, classic – so-called inalienable – liberal rights of freedom for all citizens, political rights of participation as well as social and economic rights of participation do not only stand next to one another with equal right. Rather they condition each other.

Education – egalitarian and in the sign of self-determination

Independence is the prerequisite of a self-determined life; education must enable an independent and autonomous life. This independence must be granted to all people, independent of their respective background and origin. Therefore, education is one of the central questions of justice and will also be that in the future. We want an educational system that starting at the pre-school level does not reproduce social differences, but offers to each and everyone the chance for an independent development. Therefore, we want an equal and cost-free access to all educational institutions – for the individual's whole life-span.

School in particular, but also the institutions of continued learning today do not even fulfil their self-promulgated claim to be preparing for professional life. We want to change that. Education is supposed to make possible an independent free life. The unilateral orientation to the pretence of one's gainful employment biography as the core of a neoliberal educational reform does not do justice to this claim and even contradicts it.

The acquisition of knowledge and abilities in self-determined learning processes must be the goal of egalitarian and emancipative education. To that end, the basic understanding of educational institutions must change: individual strength, weaknesses and inclinations of the individuals must be placed at the centre and be able to develop in the community. And this in a basically integrated educational system: equal and emancipatory education, for instance, needs other school forms, where it is possible to learn longer in common. Just as important are alternative learning and teaching methods and the possibility for self-determined learning processes. To that end, scopes of freedom must be created for the individual girl or boy. Individuality in the sense of independence should not be levelled, but must be promoted. For another school and learning culture, there is a need for democratic schools, where the common way is developed in common. More organisational and pedagogic scopes of freedom for the individual, fundamentally democratic educational institution are a step towards another kind of learning for all.

III – How it is to be done

Nobody can be emancipated, that is in the final analysis always the task of each and everyone him- and herself/of all of us. But we consider it as a central task of socialist, emancipative politics to open room for the free unfolding of all. Freedom for each and every one will only be enabled by a social redistribution. A political approach according to which the state regulates the walks of life paternalistically "for" the people, however, is not a way. We vouch upon the forces of civil society, on the traditions of resistance of the social movements and the wish of the individuals to shape their own world democratically. This understanding distinguishes itself fundamentally of the neoliberal cry for more "individual responsibility" which means nothing else but the privatisation of social risks.

And last but not least, we also wage on a strong, modern, democratic-socialist party that must maintain its character as membership party and as independent and politically capable structure and at the same time must offer many open interfaces for initiatives, projects and committed people without party affiliation. It is both a matter of capacity for action at the parliamentary level as well as at the same time a completely new quality of communication and interaction with social movements and civil society.

Whatever changes in the sense of socialist politics, however, may be striven for, marginalising, intransparent and despotic methods counter-act any be it ever so progressive approach. The road to the participation of as many interested and concerned in political decision-making may be difficult; however, it is the only one possible for an emancipative political approach.

What holds for the social concepts of a left, emancipatory party also holds for its international processes and of course also for the party re-founding process just taking place. When no negotiations eye to eye take place internally, a party can certainly also not negotiate eye to eye with any other organisation. Therefore, mere top-down processes or even authoritarian styles of leadership are a threat to a democratic re-founding process. The certainly very arduous process of comprehensive and equal participation here as well is a decisive guarantee for the success of the

re-founding process, at whose end there will stand a party in which the emancipatory policy approaches of the Left Party.PDS will be well kept.

We want to contribute our thoughts to emancipative left politics into the re-founding process of the party. It belongs to our basic understanding not to place these as ready-made into the public space. We rather want to open a corridor for discourse. All those, for whom freedom and equality as well as solidarity are the central elements of left politics, we therefore call upon to get on the way with us into the confrontation over emancipatory politics and on the way towards a New Left. We look forward to that.

Also thanks to the action of the Left world-wide, people all over the globe in the meantime have more to lose than their chains. Yet today there is also more to win than ever before: Another world is after all not only necessary but possible. Let's make a contribution to that by the common creation of a NEW LEFT in this country!

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Translated by Carla Krüger, June 8, 2006

<http://www.transform-network.org/index.php?id=537&L=0> (11.10.2006)