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of democracy«

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INTERNATIONAL QUARTERLY EDITION

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# Editorial

In both positive and negative ways, the elections to the European Parliament held in May, 2014, may turn out to have been a turning point in the history of European unification. To begin with the positive, this was the first European election in which the great »party families« of the EU put up top candidates for the office of Commission President. This move may give additional impetus to the democratization and mobilization of the EU citizen body, provided of course that the winner of the election actually assumes the office for which he ran. The importance of the EU Parliament, the principal institution of European democracy, has continued to grow, while the democratic deficit of the Union diminishes, a shortcoming that has often been lamented (e.g., in this journal) by no less an international celebrity than the philosopher Jürgen Habermas. But the elections also showed that the citizens of Europe will not regain their trust in the Union unless it can quickly solve the social and economic problems that confront the continent's politics. Germany, especially, must do more since it is the EU's strongest member in precisely these areas.



The EU elections also sent a negative signal: the unprecedented surge of anti-European populists in nearly all the member-countries. In a few of them, notably key members Britain and France, far-right parties became the leading political forces. They now comprise about one quarter of all the deputies in the EU Parliament and oppose uncompromisingly all steps toward further unification, even though such steps will be vital for the Union's survival in days to come. The EU will be put to a severe test as it attempts to resolve this fatal contradiction: just at a time when new steps toward transnational integration are on the agenda, it must deal with a regression toward nationalist attitudes. But Europe has no alternative.

In this issue we will also continue our debate on the relationship among democracy, civil liberties, and the Internet. This time we will look at the role of Silicon Valley's Internet behemoths such as Google, Amazon, Facebook, et al. It is not simply espionage on the Web that has helped debase what seemed a marvelous instrument of democratic communication into a tool of control and intimidation. The more we learn about how these Internet giants collect and use our data, the more clearly we recognize that they have taken advantage of the public's inattention to set up a kind of feudal empire. They have claimed almost inconceivably broad privileges while creating a web of dependencies for their users. Thus, the challenge they pose for revitalizing democratic self-determination is comparable to that faced in an earlier age by societies seeking to regulate the industrial revolution in Europe.

*Thomas Meyer*

Thomas Meyer  
Editor-in-Chief and Co-Publisher

## »The true goal is the transnationalization of democracy«

*When it comes to Europe's future, the provocative, world-renowned philosopher Jürgen Habermas can be counted on to make his voice heard, usually offering insights that shape the terms of debate. He is especially keen to promote the democratization of the European confederation. In a talk with Thomas Meyer, Habermas clarifies his agenda for moving Europe beyond its current crisis.*

**NG/FH:** In May of 2003 you teamed up with the late French philosopher Jacques Derrida to issue a joint appeal for European renewal. At that time large-scale mass demonstrations against America's war in Iraq were going on in a number of European capitals, which you interpreted as a »signal of the birth of a European public.« Have the hopes you expressed then been borne out in the intervening years?

**Jürgen Habermas:** As a matter of fact, the invasion of Iraq by the »coalition of the willing« did mark the beginning of a political and mental distancing of Europe from a United States that was then governed by neo-conservatives. It should be noted that Angela Merkel expressed support for the invasion at the time through a high-profile visit to George Bush. But even the election of Obama has not reversed the trend—fortunately without triggering an anti-American backlash. To this extent the anti-war demonstrations of February 15, 2003 did indeed indicate that Europe – especially continental Europe – was ready to terminate the benevolent protectorate that the United States had exercised over its Western half in the latter years of the twentieth century. However, they did not signal that a European civic consciousness was dawning. It has only been since 2008 that a

highly dialectical awareness gradually has begun to emerge, that the citizens of Europe – above all those in the euro zone – share a common destiny. Yet it is also true that we do not really »share« this destiny, since it is experienced »nationally,« in diametrically – almost perversely – opposite ways, depending on whether one is in a donor or recipient country.

**NG/FH:** The European crisis in all of its manifold dimensions smolders on. There are good reasons to believe that the persistent European misery is more and more undermining the prospects for a (truly necessary) advance in the direction of European unification. You have insisted that the crisis should offer an occasion for EU politicians in every country to abandon the »poll-driven administrative approach« they had usually taken to these problems, because they feared a citizen backlash. You would like them to adopt instead a »mentality-shaping« brand of politics, reinvigorating by their actions the jaded European consciousness of the citizens of the European Union. Why do you suppose that this is not happening?

**Habermas:** It is obvious enough why parties in the Federal Republic do not want to come to grips with the Europe issue in public. In the last parliamentary election the voters overwhelmingly confirmed the success of the populist »do not touch it« approach, which amounts to the advice: »Just let mommy do it. She will keep your money safe.« That electoral outcome would surely discourage other parties from bothering a pacified public with uncomfortable alternatives. Now, in a climate of unchallenged prejudices against »Brussels,« wouldn't they have to worry even more

about being bashed as traitors to the national interest, if they emerged from cover and dared to call for greater commonality in Europe? Let me be clear. My criticisms are not directed against the concern to protect national interests, but against myopia driven by an opportunism that is grounded in power-political considerations and fails to balance short-term advantages against middle- and long-term interests.

**NG/FH:** You have often said that finding a way out of the European crisis that will stand the test of time presupposes a »shift of perspective.« Exactly what kind of perspective do you have in mind here?

**Habermas:** Without some perspective it is impossible to recognize the flaws in previous policies. To clarify that point, let me first go a bit farther afield. A log of the crisis has appeared in print recently, entitled *Europe's Puppetmasters: Who Really Governs in Brussels*, written by two journalists, Cerstin Gammelin, Brussels correspondent for the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* and Raimund Löw, foreign correspondent for the Austrian Broadcasting Network. The book reads like an economic detective story and mercilessly exposes the national selfishness of the German government. Beginning in October, 2008 the federal government rejected overtures by its partners to forge common European procedures for fear that this might impose financial burdens on its own citizens. At every critical juncture, the German government was quick to serve the interests of investors, while insisting that the problems be shifted onto the shoulders of the crisis countries through debt financing. Throughout the talks it invoked the principle of national sovereignty, something that these countries – and not only they – had long since lost. Our government repudiates political responsibility for the misery of entire generations, social strata, and regions, a misery it caused by

pursuing a form of crisis management that was confined to peddling austerity here in the middle of our affluent continent. It recoils even from the most cautious steps toward a common fiscal, economic, and social policy. Rather than do any of those things, Angela Merkel prefers to let the European Central Bank pull her chestnuts out of the fire, which betrays a lack of perspective on her part. In order to accomplish that, Mr. Draghi has to put on an act, pretending that his bank possesses a degree of fiscal sovereignty that it actually lacks. Of course, that approach also burdens the German taxpayers, but they don't realize it and don't blame it on the Chancellor.

Meanwhile, the economies of the crisis countries have contracted so much that investors are returning. Apart from the fact that the banking crisis continues to smolder, there are three principal consequences that should lead us to change leadership:

- We have once again slipped into the semi-hegemonic position that turned Germany into a source of instability in Europe in the years after 1871. Exploiting its newly acquired political heft, the German government has pushed through its own ideas and promptly generated the very kind of intra-European tensions that we thought had been overcome due to the process of European unification.

- In the wake of its efforts to resolve the crisis, the European Council has given itself new prerogatives. That, together with the expansion of the competencies of the European Commission, has intensified the already existing legitimization deficit that afflicts decisions made in Brussels. In turn, those trends have reinforced trends toward a recrudescence of the nation-state.

- The European Union is being drawn increasingly into a technocratic vortex. At the same time, the structural causes of the crisis have still not been addressed. Chief among those is the gap that has opened up between different national economies as

a result of our having a currency union without a political union.

**NG/FH:** But how are the overdue advances toward European democratization – or for that matter social, economic, and fiscal integration – conceivable unless the politicians set an example? Can the European moment be revived by activating European civil society, or is the further growth of anti-European populism the price that inevitably would have to be paid for it?

**Habermas:** There cannot be a European movement from below today. That is the case because continued European integration is likely going to force itself on us due to the dangers that could be averted by a »strong« Europe. In short, further integration is more likely to be justified on defensive than on offensive grounds. Of course, democratic self-preservation against the constraints of capitalism gone wild is a good reason. But what is missing is the directly evident emancipatory vision that once inspired the European constitutional movement, and even today kindles the revolts and ferment in Arab, Eastern European and Asian countries. European nations have good reasons for wanting a political union. But it is not intuitively obvious to them that they then have to build up the familiar edifice of the nation-state and share the newly added stories with other nations. It would take a polarizing debate in the respective national public spheres for us to reach that point.

We should not absolve political elites from their duty to inform, considering that they have long neglected to include the populace in the process of unification. The media, too, are partly responsible for the fact that there has not been any competition among well-informed, thoroughly tested opinions in the political public sphere concerning Europe's future. Only if that were the case would it be possible to choose among reasonable alternatives.

**NG/FH:** More than once you have castigated the »executive federalism« practiced by European governments in their efforts to resolve the fiscal and economic crises of the EU. That brand of federalism disdains the democratic sovereignty of the parliaments in the member countries, even while refusing to involve the European Parliament. At the same time, you have also emphasized that the Lisbon Treaty of 2007 comes closer to embodying a transnational democracy than many critics have supposed. You have referred to the goal of a constitutional federation of states as an involuntary brake on progress toward democratic integration in the Union. Why is that? Exactly what perspective do you have in mind here?

**Habermas:** Do you remember the historians' dispute? At that time [the late 1980s; ed.] critics always claimed that certain historians were fabricating the collective guilt of the German people out of the crimes of the National Socialists. People simply ignored the fact that, decades earlier, Karl Jaspers had already employed his philosophical precision to distinguish between »guilt« and »liability.« Something similar is going on today. The allegedly »realistic« defenders of the nation-state criticize people like me as the avant-garde of a European federal state, so that they will then have an easier time dismissing us as utopians.

That is why I put a premium on stating goals precisely. As I see it, if all the federalists want to do is enlarge the format of the federal state, they are overshooting the real goal, which is necessary integration. If you look at matters in the proper light, even the United States of America did not become a federal state until after the Second World War.

The true goal is the transnationalization of democracy. Even a supranational commonwealth would meet this demanding criterion, although it need not have the

character of a state. But it has to be organized in such a way that its constitution in principle could have been ratified by the citizenry in their dual capacity as citizens of the nation state and as European citizens. The European treaties have gotten quite far along by following this route.

But we do have to abolish the inter-governmentalism that has gained even more ground during the crisis. The European Council would have to be dethroned, at least in the core area of Europe, i.e., the euro zone. This assembly of heads of government is designed to negotiate unanimously acceptable compromises among inflexible national interests. For that reason, and because the government chiefs need to seek legitimacy exclusively from their domestic constituents, the European Council cannot do its work effectively. Political interests are aggregated much differently in the European Parliament, which is organized around party blocs or delegations. Here, national interests are counterbalanced by a Europe-wide process of interest articulation that transcends national boundaries. To put it crudely, the European Council would have to make its decisions by majority vote, and the Council and Parliament would have to share lawmaking functions in every legislative field.

**NG/FH:** The first four decades of European unification were shaped by the methods of Jean Monnet, the co-founder of the EU. He preferred to present the citizens of Europe with as many attractive political outcomes as possible, but all bestowed from the top down, without involving them much in the consultations and decision-making phases from which the outcomes had emerged (output legitimacy). Many people say that, from the very outset, all-European solidarity and European civic consciousness have always been too weak to furnish a solid foundation for the growth of the European community (input legitimacy). They add that this state of affairs continues

even today. Is there anything to the argument that Europe is irrevocably caught up in a trade-off or reciprocal relationship, in principle, between the two forms of legitimation? Because it is so large and its legitimation chains are consequently so long, and because it is internally diverse and thus manages only weak civic solidarity, the European Union may be stuck with an inverse ratio of legitimation by government performance and legitimation by citizen participation.

**Habermas:** Output legitimation is a sociological concept that describes a democracy for, but not of the people – a pseudo-democracy that pacifies people who have not been asked about their own opinions, or at least deters them from engaging in overt protests. In a normative sense, government performance in a democracy always has to be measured against the program it was elected to carry out. Without this input of voter preferences, we just don't know what is really in the interest of the citizens. Therefore, output legitimation, pacifying citizens who have never even been asked what they want, is no substitute for input legitimation. The latter has the power to bind because it emerges from democratic interest-aggregation. On the other hand, social services can be excellent instruments to strengthen the consciousness of a common European identity among the citizens of different states. For example, one might offer them unemployment or pension insurance valid all over Europe. During the most recent crisis, proposals along these lines were being discussed in Brussels. A common European foreign policy might perform a function comparable to that of »social Europe.«

**NG/FH:** Elections were held for the European Parliament last May. Do you think they harbored the potential to push the EU toward greater democracy? The European



public sphere was much more actively involved this time, because the European party families presented candidates for top offices, and because the subsequent choice of a Commission President was tied to the outcome of the elections. Was that a promising move?

**Habermas:** The new voting procedure for the Commission President and the decision to have jointly nominated candidates run for high office might lead to greater

politicization. By now the crisis has drawn the attention of the broader public to European questions, which only reinforces that trend. In this respect even all the noise emanating from the political right is not such a bad thing. Despite all our skepticism, we should be encouraged by the passion and experience of politicians like Martin Schulz, who do have the right perspective and will make good use of the decision-making powers already vested in the European parliament.

*Marvin Oppong*

## Has Digital Feudalism Arrived?

»As long as users keep turning to the Internet as an information source, Google's opportunities to increase its sales will continue growing,« predicts the last year-end report by Google Germany. Hardly anyone denies that the Internet will continue to grow. But it is equally evident that not only Google's sales, but also those of other Internet giants such as Amazon, eBay, Yahoo, or Facebook, will increase. As they do, so will the economic power of the big players on the Net.

Matteo Pasquinelli, a scholar at Queen Mary University of London, argues that we have entered an era of digital neo-feudalism, because digital cooperation in the Net is giving rise to a new social order. Pasquinelli talks about a »digital division of labor,« that exploits the right to free expression. Is there anything to his argument? What role do the big monopolistic firms really play in the Internet?

The top dog here, Google, is more than just a traditional monopolist. The Internet company profits from a so-called natural monopoly which arises when a firm takes advantage of its size to reduce costs and thus provide goods and services to the market more cheaply than most or

all of its competitors. One Google search more or less is virtually free to the company, while profits from advertising, Google's biggest profit center, continue to flow. Recently Google reported annual sales of no less than 59.8 billion euros, of which 50.5 billion were derived from advertising sales. That is just about equivalent to the gross domestic product of Sri Lanka in 2012.

Of course, from a cost perspective natural monopolies are actually good for the consumer, provided that the monopoly firm does not charge excessive prices. Many natural monopolies, such as railroads, were state-owned enterprises for that very reason. And that is the crucial point: Google is a private business and is only subject to the influence of the state within certain limits. The Mountain View company sets its own prices, taking advantage of its quasi-monopoly position in the search engine market and in the provision of certain services such as Google Maps, which no competitor offers. In these ways Google has become a central component of the digital infrastructure, hardly distinguishable any more from a major bank or energy monopolist in terms of its importance.



The British economist Rufus Pollock has analyzed this trend in his study, *Is Google the Next Microsoft? Competition, Welfare and Regulation In Internet Search*. He concludes that the search engine market »will continue down the path toward monopoly.«

Google has changed the entire structure of the Internet, which now features a hierarchy headed by Google itself, with the others beneath it. »The apparently flat ocean of the Internet was reshaped by Google into dynamic hierarchies ranked by visibility and importance,« wrote Pasquinelli in a dossier for Germany's Federal Office for Political Education. Among other things, Google's PageRank determines where something will turn up in the hierarchy of search hits, whether it is a person or a product. For Pasquinelli that suggest that the function is a »formula for hegemonic accumulation of value.«

The Bettina Wulf case revealed the crucial role Google has assumed not just in the economic realm, but also with respect to information. Mrs. Wulf, the ex-wife of former Federal President Christian Wulf, sued Google, because the company's Auto-complete function showed ideas with which Bettina Wulf did not wish to be identified. In another case the Federal Court vindicated a businessman who had sued Google because the Auto-complete function associated him with Scientology. The Court decided that the entrepreneur's personal rights [i.e., to informational self-determination, ed.] had been violated by the »completions« done by the Google function.

Pasquinelli calls Google »a parasitic organization that skims off value created by the intelligence of the entire community.« For instance, Google

### *Modern-day Robber Barons*

has scanned books from public libraries supported by general tax revenues and then made the contents available on the Internet free of charge. When someone clicks on a Google ad, the profits that are gene-

rated remain with Google, while others have paid for the books.

The *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* wrote of Google that »when someone does an image search, for some time now Google has been displaying large-format images, so that the users no longer need to go back to the original page, which means that the page now lacks viewers.« Thus, the company is behaving more like a modern digital robber baron than like a feudal lord.

In 2010 Google admitted that its street-view cars had saved data from unsecured WLAN sites in thirty countries. Google promised to delete the data, but in 2012 the company conceded that it had actually not deleted all the data, contrary to its assurances. Because it had recorded data without permission, including fragments of sent e-mails, Google had to pay a fine in the United States, but of only seven million dollars. That is roughly the amount that Google would have earned in 2013 in around five hours.

The case of Microsoft's monopolistic behavior also makes it obvious that the state has few options for defending against multi-national Internet companies. For years Microsoft quarreled with the EU Commission about the configuration of its browsers. For a while, it seemed as though the problem had been solved when Microsoft agreed to include competitors' browsers in its quasi-monopolistic Windows operating system. However, last year the EU had to levy a new fine against the U.S. software company because it had exploited its market power in unacceptable ways, putting its competitors at a disadvantage by offering users of Windows 7 only Internet Explorer. The fine came to 561 million euros. To put that figure in perspective, Microsoft earned US \$ 21.9 billion in 2013 alone.

Have companies like Google and Microsoft already become so powerful that the state can only control them through fines?

Internet firms such as Amazon have long since outgrown the garage-startup phase and become more like global corporations that operate not only in the economy but also in political back channels, where they pull strings to get their way. Thus, one learns from the EU's Lobbyregister that Facebook, for example, invested a total of 400,000 - 450,000 euros in »direct lobbying efforts« aimed at »EU organs« during 2012. One of the areas in which the company lobbies is »human rights.«

The Apple Corporation, known for its protectionism in respect to device compatibility and the iTunes music platform, also tries to influence the EU. According to Lobbyregister, Apple has employees »who have credentials that allow them access to the premises of the European Parliament.« Apple does not limit its lobbying activities to the areas of »digital economy« and »consumer protection«; it is also involved in matters of »education and environmental issues.« Apple's own statistics show that it recently spent between 250,000 and 300,000 euros a year on EU lobbying alone.

The Internet site Lobbyplug revealed that lobbyists from Amazon and Ebay had influenced the wording of an important position paper prepared by the EU Committee on the Internal Market and Consumer Protection about the EU's regulations on data protection. One of the passages drafted by the lobbyists and adopted by the Committee focused on the disparity in power positions between private persons and corporations, when the former are asked to give »voluntary« consent to the dissemination of personal data in the context of contractual agreements. EU Commissioner Viviane Reding, in her draft of the EU data protection regulations, called such consent to the transfer of data invalid, if there were a »considerable imbalance« between the power positions of the persons involved and the processor. The Internal Market Committee wanted to

have this section eliminated from the draft, just as Amazon and eBay had suggested.

The public became aware that Amazon does things other than sell books no later than the time when the NSA scandal broke. Revelations connected to that affair indicated that the American company, via its affiliate Amazon Web Services, had secured a major CIA commission.

Google, too, long since has expanded into other areas. In January of this year it came out that Google had bought a company that produces networked thermostats. This was the second largest takeover in Google's history. One headline read: »Google wants to get into your bedroom.« In California Google has invested in the world's largest solar energy plant. The company has also become involved in science as the founder of and major donor to the Institute for Internet and Society at Berlin's Humboldt University. According to University sources, Google will »contribute 4.5 million euros« in the first three years.

Wikipedia is also one of the giants of the Internet, and the seventh most frequently visited website. According to an online study carried out in 2012 by the German public media networks ARD and ZDF, 75 % of men and 70 % of women reported using Wikipedia »at least occasionally.« Furthermore, the largest encyclopedia that humanity possesses could soon become its only one: print competitors such as Brockhaus (which also appears in digital form) have already shut down. Wikipedia's pre-eminent position is also obvious one when one considers that even law courts, including German's Federal Court, relies on Wikipedia.

The Wikipedia Foundation, which runs the domain Wikipedia.org, is courting Google. In 2012, it was revealed that Google's founder Sergey Brin and his wife Anna Wojciki, a genetics researcher, had donated \$ 500,000 to the Wikimedia Foundation. A year before, Google had forked over \$ 2

million to the foundation. The reason for their support is obvious. The search engine monopolist Google uses the contents of knowledge monopolist Wikipedia and thus has an interest in making sure that Wikipedia thrives.

Neo-feudalism, monopoly, capitalism – whatever you want to call it: the awesome

power of these Internet corporations is unmistakable. That power is certainly not going to diminish, given the increasing importance of the Internet. That is the reason why effective competition and consumer regulations that are actually enforced, transparent lobbying and a stronger rule of law are more vital than ever.



#### **Marvin Oppong**

is a freelance journalist and lecturer in Bonn. His study »Verdeckte PR in Wikipedia – Das Weltwissen im Visier von Unternehmen« (Covert PR in Wikipedia) was printed and awarded by the Otto-Brenner Stiftung.

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*Michael Brie*

## **Stalin's Communist Victims**

On March 4 the executive committee of the German political party known as The Left decided to put up a new memorial plaque at the party's headquarters, the Karl Liebknecht House. The memorial was to bear the inscription: »Let us honor the memories of the thousands of German communists and anti-fascists who were arbitrarily persecuted, deprived of their rights, deported to penal camps, exiled for decades, and murdered in the Soviet Union between the 1930s and the 1950s.« On December 17 the plaque was installed adjacent to another one commemorating the deeds of the German communist leader Ernst Thälmann in the very same house. Between those two dates a fierce intra-party dispute had broken out.

The argument was not about whether there should be a memorial to the victims of Stalinism in general and the communist victims in particular. The East German Party of Democratic Socialism had already promised to do that at its founding congress in December of 1989. As chair of the PDS, Lothar Bisky endorsed that course of action: »We too have an obligation to honor

those who were killed by Stalin, especially since we are the only ones who will – at least in spirit – commemorate Stalin's numerous communist victims.« Then, in 2006, a memorial stone was laid at the cemetery in Berlin-Friedrichsfelde next to the »memorial to the socialists« that bore the inscription: »To the victims of Stalinism.« Even this step stirred up controversy.

Ever since 2008, the children of those who suffered at Stalin's hands had been demanding a worthy, palpable tribute through their organization, the »Working group to commemorate German anti-fascists who were persecuted, deported, and murdered during their emigration in the Soviet Union.« They thought that the Karl Liebknecht House would be an appropriate venue for it. So how could there have been any internal disagreements within the party, when, after all, no one doubted that German communists had been persecuted in the Soviet Union? It was the European Parliamentary deputies from the Communist Party of Greece who put their dissent in a nutshell: »There is a despicable attempt being made to portray German anti-fascists

as victims of the Soviet workers' state. This is a still filthier version of the official EU policy which equates fascism/Nazism with communism, advancing the ›theory of the extremes‹ (Communist Party of Greece, 2013). Hans Modrow, chair of The Left Party's Council of Elders, offered the same criticism in a 2013 interview: »And now the Karl Liebknecht House, protected as a historical monument since 1977 and commemorating the activities of the German Communist Party and its Chairman [Thälmann-M.B.], who was murdered by the Nazis, is to become a quite different kind of monument by virtue of this new plaque. It will be a wailing wall against the Soviet Union and its Stalinist helpers, the accomplices who worked there. [...] The culture of commemoration in The Left is more and more becoming part of an anti-communist Zeitgeist.«

By contrast, the advocates of the plaque saw in a public memorial at this location a sign of their own sovereignty. When the plaque was unveiled, Theodor Bergmann, by then nearly 100 years old, was asked to make a speech. Bergmann had been a member of the youth organization of the German Communist Party's opposition group that spoke out in favor of cooperation with the SPD in light of the fascist danger. Invoking the name of August Thälheimer, he observed: »Through the critique of our own errors and the mistakes made in our struggle for a better world, we display the intellectual diversity of the revolutionary movement, refute bourgeois propaganda, and gather courage and strength – for the unfinished class struggle.« One of the founders of the working group, Inge Münz-Koennen, remarked: »We are used to speaking of the survivors as ›witnesses to history.‹ But what do you call someone who is not the witness to a crime, but who has been wounded to the quick and knows that the wound will never heal? We talk about victims when in truth all of one's energies were needed just to keep the

children and elders in the family alive. No language has yet been invented to express many of these things.« In the name of the working group, Ursula Schwartz concluded her speech at the unveiling of the plaque with these words: »In this place, which meant so much to their generation, German anti-fascists and communists who were victims of Stalinist terror will finally receive the public tribute they have been so long denied.«

Why is it so hard for people imbued with the traditions of twentieth-century communist parties to own up to the crimes that those parties committed, especially those against their own adherents? The answer lies in the greatness and the tragedy of this specific movement. Rarely has a political movement managed to captivate so many people in so short a time and reshape so many societies in its own image as did the communist parties built on Leninist principles during the twentieth century. And never, prior to the era we associate with Stalin, did the leaders and apparatuses of any movement repress, persecute, incarcerate, and murder so many of their own supporters. In his 2008 novel, *Life and Fate*, Vassily Grossman makes a communist prisoner in the gulag say: »I don't envy people who live in freedom outside. I envy those who ended up in German concentration camps. How nice it would be to serve your time knowing that you are being beaten by a fascist. Here, we are in the most terrible situation, because we are being mistreated by our own people.« But how could it come to this? How could the suppression of dissidents – already diagnosed by Rosa Luxemburg – turn into the suppression of people who think as communists? The cause must be sought in Leninism as well as in Stalinism. The two must be distinguished carefully, yet there is a connection between them.

Communism promised to extirpate every form of exploitation, repression, discrimination and violence by being radical,

i.e., getting to the root of those evils. It wanted to overturn the property relations that gave rise to the interests that, so it was assumed, were solely responsible for capitalism, racism, patriarchy, and war. Yet this new party harbored internal contradictions. It was supposed to anticipate the future society of free and equal persons, i.e. prefigure, in the present day, the free association that would only arrive in the future. Yet at the same time it also demanded blind trust in and unconditional obedience to the leadership. Both norms were anchored in Communist Party statutes, which thus combined the most extensive freedom with the harshest discipline. Leninist politics was not without principles. On the contrary, it had only one ambition: securing the power of the Bolsheviks, since that would presumably guarantee a socialist transformation of society.

The communists' self-identity was quite closely bound up with their membership in such a party, because the latter was able to attain long-term power over major societies for the first time in the history of socialism. Its success seemed to justify what Lenin and the Bolshevik version of »party communism« had done. What no one realized, at least until very late in the game, was the tragedy inherent in a communism of this kind. An organization of this type might indeed have been well-suited to seize power under quite specific circumstances (war and civil war). But those very features simultaneously rendered impossible any lasting progress on the road to liberation. The moment the rule of the Communist Party – i.e., Leninism – was established, the wellsprings of freedom were blocked, because it became impossible for human beings to express and organize themselves freely and autonomously. Communists embarked on the road to a new form of tutelage, and – at the very minimum – the leadership of the movement was itself to blame. Their political opponents recognized the contradiction be-

tween the pretensions to freedom and the reality of dictatorship, but, increasingly, the communists themselves saw it as well, at least to the extent that they did not relinquish their individual existence and still understood the road to liberation as a path toward enhanced freedom. Party communism forbade anyone to apply Marx's categorical imperative critically to the circumstances of the emergent state-socialist society: »to overthrow all relations in which man is a debased, enslaved, abandoned, despicable being.«

The idea was to stifle the motivations that had led people to rise up against capitalism, imperialism, and war, whenever the boot in the face of workers, peasants, and intellectuals was worn by members of a communist party and its organs. Ernst Bloch, who learned his lesson about Stalinism and yet remained hopeful during the 1950's, made the following observation concerning human rights: »There is no caesura that absolutely divides yesterday from tomorrow. Working people in capitalist countries exercise their right of resistance by raising the banner of human rights; in socialist countries they ought to carry forward that same banner as they build socialism, taking advantage of their right – indeed their duty – to criticize the process of construction. Otherwise we would have authoritarian socialism, a contradiction in terms, as the International is fighting after all to achieve human rights: organized maturity.« But it is impossible in principle to separate good and evil completely. The end must always be considered in the context of and in relation to the means. Party communism was tempted to forget that qualifier. Every conflict was stripped of its nuances and cast as a matter of polar opposites: socialism or barbarism, socialism or fascism. The ghastly neologism »social fascism« was just one of the expressions coined by this brand of Manichaeism. As early as January, 1918, at the first and final meeting of Russia's

Constituent Assembly, Nikolai Bukharin was already declaring a »war of life and death against the bourgeois-parliamentary republic.« From February, 1918 on, deputies from the other parties, starting with the »right-wing« Social Revolutionaries and Mensheviks were removed from all political offices by administrative means, even though they had been a majority in the Constituent Assembly. It became impossible to resolve political conflicts by civil means. Political space, understood as a »space that can only be created by a plurality of people, such that each one moves among his equals,« and that is »centered on freedom« in the sense that a person is »neither rules nor is ruled« (Hannah Arendt) was irrevocably destroyed. The dissolution of the Constituent Assembly made the nearly four-year civil war inevitable. It claimed the lives of about one million people, including soldiers who were its immediate victims as well as those who died either due to the terror inflicted by both sides or as a result of anti-Jewish pogroms. The number of its civilian victims, who succumbed to disease, hunger, and other causes, is estimated at eight million, four times higher than the number of Russia's dead in the First World War. »Freedom for those who think differently« thus had a bloody denouement.

Once differences were cast in the most extreme turns by Manichaean thinking, it began to seem as though violence against human beings might be the lesser of two evils, or perhaps a necessary evil, or even a good thing. Having been demonized as the incarnation of evil, the person who thought or acted differently was stripped of human dignity. Stalin's chief prosecutor in the Moscow trials, Andrey Vyshinsky, rested his »case« in the trial of intra-party critics Kamenev and Zinoviev by saying that the pair were mad dogs who should be shot. On November 7, 1937, Stalin delivered an after-dinner speech celebrating the unity of the Soviet Union and adding:

»Therefore, anyone who tries to destroy this unity of the socialist state [...] is an enemy, a sworn enemy of the state, the nations of the USSR. And we will annihilate every one of these enemies, even if he is an old Bolshevik. We will completely annihilate his kin, his family. [...] To the annihilation of all enemies: themselves, their kin, their families, to the end!« Against the backdrop of this »battle of life and death,« it was easy to lose sight of the fact that, although we can never dispense with violence entirely, it is always an evil, always violates human dignity, and therefore requires the strictest moral-ethical and institutional controls.

Stalinism became possible only because Leninism had taken over the communist movement. Yet for Lenin and the original Bolsheviks the power of their own party was in the last analysis a dictatorial means to achieve the ends of emancipation and solidarity, and that was the criterion against which it was always judged. With Stalinism, on the other hand, power became an end in itself. Because of Stalin (and a series of other leaders of communist parties), the civilizing self-limitation of Leninism – its commitment to the self-emancipation and solidarity of oppressed classes – was abandoned. Stalinism is both the heir of Leninism and its reversal.

The reason why The Left party would be well-advised to recall the persecution of communists by organs of communist rule, especially today, is not that the adherents of party communism were somehow more deeply victimized by Stalinism than others were. Initially, Stalinism primarily engulfed those who were not associated with communism. Nor can the reason be that they deserve to be honored more highly than other victims. The adherents of the party have to commemorate them because they were both active participants in and victims of a movement, the heritage of which The Left cannot disown – either in its greatness or in its tragedy. It is a good thing that



this remembrance has now become official. Every left-wing political party today and in the future must strive to attain political and moral credibility, and to do so they will have to come to terms with Stalinism, even though that will not be the only

or even the main issue at stake. But The Left party will never be able to achieve or permanently maintain that credibility *unless* it faces up to the historical legacy of Leninism and Stalinism.

*(Abridged version)*



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## **Right-wing Extremism in Hungarian Society and Party Politics**

The right-wing radicalism that emerged in Hungary soon after the collapse of the Soviet Empire, while still relatively soft, did alter the country's party system in important ways. As early as 1988, the Hungarian Democratic Forum or MDF (which became the ruling party after 1990) began to exhibit signs of nationalist radicalism. This was the case, at least, in the circles associated with some of its leading politicians and/or members of its populist wing. In 1992 the writer István Csurka, deputy chair of the MDF, founded the Party of Hungarian Life and Truth (MIEP), which based its appeal on populist ideas derived from the country's pre-war intellectual heritage: anti-Semitism, nationalism, and revisionism.

The nascent party's old-fashioned radicalism prevented it from mobilizing large masses of people. In 1998 it managed to win a few seats in the Parliament, but its political relevance faded again after 2002. Nevertheless, the Csurka phenomenon profoundly changed the political landscape. The Minister President, József Antall, who also happened to be the MDF party chairman, wanted to entrench Western-European-style Christian democracy as the Party's

ideology, an aspiration that Csurka opposed. Because, in Antall's judgment, Csurka had the bulk of the party's »awful membership« behind him, Antall made symbolic and political concessions to the nationalists. As a result, a purge of the public radio and TV network was carried out under anti-liberal, anti-socialist, and (in part) anti-Semitic auspices. Moreover, permission was granted for a semi-official reburial of István Horthy, an ally of Hitler and the regent of Hungary under the Nazis.

All these measures led to a counter-mobilization by democratic citizens and opposition parties. The Liberals (SZDSZ, or League of Free Democrats) reacted to the government's moves with extra sensitivity because of their own family history of nationalism and racism. They perceived the ideology and cultural policies of the national-conservative governing parties to be so threatening, that they joined forces with the ex-communist Socialist Party to found a movement called »Democratic Charter.« This was an especially difficult step for them, since previously they had played up their anti-Communist credentials. The collaboration between these two



parties led first to an alliance and eventually to a more enduring joint government beginning in 1994. But it also precipitated a strategic shift in the allegiance of the SZDSZ's supposedly »younger« fraternal liberal party. The Fidesz (League of Young Democrats) switched sides, joining the national-conservative camp and soon became its leading force.

But it was not until the 2010 elections that the party system and, to some extent, the topography of political cleavages as well, began to change. The most striking feature of this shift was the appearance of a new, modern, dynamic, vigorous right-wing extremist party, Jobbik (Movement for a Better Hungary), the emergence of which seemed almost like a sudden landslide. Yet the most important element of this realignment was not the success of the organized far right, which ended up with only a 17 % share of the vote, in third place behind the Socialists. What astonished everyone was the general move to the right as such and the two-thirds majority won by the nationalist-populist Fidesz, which turned it into a hegemonic majority party.

In the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century Hungarian politics and society had been deeply split along the fault lines of cultural politics and social history. The »authentic Magyars,« who wanted to preserve, cultivate, and strengthen their ethnic identity, faced off against the »cosmopolitans,« who gave top priority to catch-up modernization and the Westernization of Hungarian society. This contradiction was superseded, in the Hegelian sense, by the »new formula« of politics. While one side of the antagonistic pairing has all but disappeared, the victors are in the early stages of carrying out their tempestuous project of weakening democracy, especially liberal democracy, and introducing a »system of national co-operation.«

Hungarian political culture is characterized increasingly by expressivity and

emotionality, and decreasingly by rational decision-making. The prominence and intensity of prejudice have reached menacing levels in Hungarian society. A comparative study on prejudice sponsored by the FES in 2008 confirmed this dismal tableau of deeply-rooted intolerance and prejudice. On average two-thirds of respondents in Hungary were motivated by group-related hostility to other human beings (and this survey did not even ask about anti-Gypsy hostility, the most intense prejudice in Hungary).

Starting in 2008 the Institute for Sociology of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences sponsored a monitoring series on right-wing extremism, and discovered that responses normally considered extreme had become almost centrist and were expressed, in some cases, by a majority of the population. In the first article to summarize the results – published prior to the 2010 elections that marked the true rise of Jobbik – the Institute's director Pál Tamás laid out the following surprising and disquieting facts:

- There is a right-wing majority in the population of more than 54 %, of whom 15.4 % are radical.
- 75 % advocate government by a »strong hand,« while the same percentage prefers an out and out »leader,« and 52 % favor a one-party system.
- 60 % say that Hungary cannot be assigned any responsibility for the Second World War, nor did it have any negative role. Only 12 % accept the country's responsibility.
- 27.5 % advocate the recovery of territories »separated« from Hungary in Versailles or Paris. 36 % favor re-establishing Hungary's leading role in the Carpathian Basin.
- 70 % believe that the Roma exploit social welfare support.

● At least one-third of the respondents are active, consistent anti-Semites. 47 % say that the influence of Jews in public life is too great.

According to another study carried out two years later, the right-wing camp has continued to grow, even though it has toned down its positions only marginally. Where the topics of anti-Semitism, historiography, and revisionism are concerned, the differences between left and right are wide. But in respect to the issues of the »strong hand,« the one-party system, and the Roma question, they tend to converge. International comparisons indicate that value-orientations in Hungary tend to be more post-Soviet than is the case in the other Visegrad countries. Between 1991 and 2009, acceptance of democracy has fallen from 74 % to just 56 %. Meanwhile, acceptance of capitalism has declined from 80 % to 46 %. These are indicators of anomie that point to a serious legitimization deficit. The abrupt transition from the »Goulash Communism« of the last years of the János Kádár regime, and the feeling of security that accompanied that »soft dictatorship,« to semi-peripheral neo-liberalism has come off more or less without a hitch, even up to the present day. This is the case even though income differentials have climbed from 1:4 to 1:9 and the share of the population living in poverty has risen to one-third.

There are two templates for overcoming the legitimization crisis. In the Visegrad states (Poland, Slovakia, the Czech Republic, and Hungary), the logic of »embedded capitalism« has been widely shared. Although a neo-liberal model predominates, those states have reconciled their populations to it by means of social transfers. The other method is a state-supported identity politics, thanks to which the majority of society, imbued with (ethno-) nationalism, is willing to endure a great deal. This has been the case in the Baltic States and in Slovakia under Meciar. Hungary is now deeply in debt, yet is still required to adhere to Europe's convergence criteria. Consequently, it can no longer afford a generous social-welfare state model, particularly in the aftermath of the financial crisis. A state party

with a sense of mission is now promising fame and honor, and encouraging the populace to indulge its ethnic-populist identity and its feelings of superiority. This brand of legitimization, which relies on identifying scapegoats, can succeed in Hungary on account of its history. There is a consensus among the Hungarian people rooted in certain patterns of thought and emotion concerning the country's history. It holds that Hungary has suffered much and undeservedly so. As early as 2005 a third of respondents attributed the nation's unfortunate fate to the West and to its internal enemies. The index Demand for Right Wing Extremism (DEREX) puts Hungary in first place on the indicators for »prejudice« and right-wing value-orientations. In respect to the indicator for »anxiety« Hungary comes in second behind Bulgaria.

What brought about the right-wing extremist surge in the 2009 European elections and the rightward shift in the 2010 national polls? Between 2006 and 2008 a horrifying series of crimes was committed, including lynch-mob justice and a string of murders against the Roma. In the aftermath the media emphasized an anti-Roma tone in their coverage. Yet, although an attitude of hostility had been whipped up among the majority of the people, political actors were relatively restrained in their responses. This was the environment in which Jobbik, a previously marginal party, staked out its positions.

Despite promises to the contrary, the social-liberal coalition, victor in the 2006 elections, foisted a strict austerity program on the people. In addition, a secret speech by the Minister President Gyurcsány detailing the constant lies told by the ruling elite was recorded and made public, which outraged the populace and unleashed civil disturbances tantamount to civil war. With the collaboration of rampaging far-right groups, the radicalized Fidesz also decided to continue destabilizing the now-discredited governing parties.

The 2010 elections revealed that the pattern of the country's conflict lines, seemingly immovable after many years, had in fact shifted. The cultural cleavage between those with a Western outlook and the national traditionalists had evolved. In the new conditions of global modernity, it now marked the line of conflict between national openness and isolationism. In respect to systems of government, the cleavage currently divides liberal democracy from authoritarian rule. In socio-economic terms, the great divide runs between the market economy and guided state capitalism, not a trivial issue in a country in which 35-49 % of the people are impoverished.

Jobbik represents the extreme expression of those polarizing tendencies. The middle ranks of society have lost their sense of security due to the collapse of communism and the repeated crises occurring thereafter. In Jobbik's rhetoric they detect a language of resentment pervaded by prejudice, a language they understand because it strikes the proper political note of fear and injury. But, contrary to initial impressions, Jobbik is not only the party of downward mobility or of »losers.« Its rapid rise made observers think so, because it did especially well in the marginalized north-eastern regions, where Roma and non-Roma live side by side. However, more careful empirical research has altered the picture. Since 2010, we know that the typical Jobbik loyalist voter comes from the middle class. The reasons that its supporters have become so radicalized have more to do with culture and ideology than with socio-economic factors. Hostility to liberalism has played a role, as has the insecurity associated with the emergent pluralism of values. Other factors include status anxiety and a sense of being threatened in one's very identity.

Voting studies have yielded another surprise: the overrepresentation of non-believers. In other words, Jobbik »only« offers a secular political religion. Jobbik

sympathizers are primarily male, between twenty and forty years old, anti-Semitic/anti-Gypsy, and generally anti-establishment. They are usually rather well educated, with at least a high school diploma and often even a college degree. Their standard of living tends to be above average; they are active and live mainly in cities. Finally, they are inclined toward authoritarianism. The party attracts younger people at above-average rates.

In short, Jobbik represents the »extremism of the center« (Seymour Martin Lipset) in two different senses: first, the breadth of its appeal and, second, the values and attitudes it embodies, which are typical of the middle class. Jobbik and its sympathizers tend to be active users of the Internet and especially Facebook; in fact, they often run successful blogs and websites. This is all part and parcel of the general far-right youth culture. Besides Jobbik there are a number of other right-wing radical groups in Hungary, both legal and illegal. In 2007, elements of the Party founded a paramilitary, racist organization known as the Hungarian Guard (Magyar Gárda). In addition to enhancing Jobbik's capacity to mobilize supporters – and, incidentally, generate counter-mobilization among its opponents – this new paramilitary subsidiary has drawn considerable national and international attention to the party.

Although Fidesz is usually counted as a nationalist, right-wing populist party, critics tend to see it instead as an exponent of right-wing extremism. In my view, Fidesz is a nationalist party of so-called state capture, i.e., authoritarian state capitalism à la Putin. In contrast to Jobbik, the pro-sovereignty stance of Viktor Orbán also includes a pragmatic element. His hostility to Europe and skepticism toward the West are presented in such a way that he is made to appear as the savior of a Europe in decline. He wants to remain one of the leading

### *Right-Wing Extremism and Right-Wing Populism*

figures of the European People's Party in his persona as a »freedom fighter.«

Since the electoral triumph of Jobbik, Fidesz and the party of Gábor Vona have become political rivals. To be sure, they are indeed opponents, yet at the same time they remain ideological soulmates. One need only recall that Vona was still a member of Fidesz in 2004. In those days Orbán and Vona had gambled that Jobbik's then-youth movement might be able to operate as a link between the party and right-wing extremist, radical nationalist organizations within the militant »Citizens' Circle« known as the »League for the Nation.«

Analyses of electoral support patterns in 2010 reveal that about one-half of Jobbik voters had been Fidesz supporters in 2006, one-third had defected from the Socialists, and the rest were enlisted from the ranks of non-voters. It is estimated that Jobbik has exploited only about two-thirds of the right-wing extremist electoral potential, and that a third of Fidesz voters are in sympathy with right-wing extremist ideas. Still, there is quite a bit of crossover voting between the two nationalist parties. On one hand, Jobbik adherents are lured away by the prospect of being in the majority and consequently holding political power if they vote for Fidesz. On the other hand, considering the overlapping values and attitudes in the two parties, they are attracted by the way in which Fidesz deliberately and continuously absorbs and incorporates Jobbik's favorite issues. Especially when it comes to symbolic, cultural, and »national« policies. The parties' main slogans and positions are identical.

Nevertheless, there is an important difference between them. For example, Orbán tiptoes around the racism issue, though some of his prominent Party associates are less reticent than he is. At any rate, the grey area between the two parties is considerable.

Parliamentary elections held on April 4 have confirmed and continued the right-

ward drift of 2010. The left was able to improve its share of the vote to 26 % once the second ballots for party lists were tallied. Fidesz successfully defended its two-thirds majority, although its vote total slipped from 53 % to 44.5 %. There were at least two reasons for its success. First, it rigged the electoral system in its own favor. Second, it exploited the asymmetrical media access available to the various parties in a regime that is really more autocratic than democratic. Jobbik was also a quasi-winner, chalking up 20.5 % of the vote. Fidesz came in first in 106 constituencies, while the Left captured only ten. Jobbik's candidates, by contrast, did not carry even one electoral district. However, the right-wing extremist party came in second in a number of constituencies, both in the affluent areas of western Hungary and in some poor eastern towns.

If one hopes to explain why a reinvigorated Jobbik has a good chance of becoming Hungary's second-strongest political force in the upcoming European elections, one must bear in mind the following points. The party is running a professional campaign, in the course of which it mainly has emphasized social issues. It has made an intense effort to attract voters all over the country, but especially in smaller towns. It speaks both the harmless in-crowd language as well as that of overt racism.

The socio-economic situation in the country demands answers, and the less-than-charismatic Left is not able to deliver them. On one hand, it is divided into quasi-antagonistic camps; on the other, its public image bears the stamp of the same old faces that have been widely discredited already. The Left, now so unsure of itself, does not offer much of an alternative to the tightly-run, almost monolithic »Fidesz Hungary«. Voters who are still – or once again – disappointed by the Left either defect to Jobbik or stay home.

## *Between the European Elections and Polls for National Parliaments*

The »culture war« waged by the big parties (Fidesz versus the Left and the Liberals) has permitted the genuine neo-Nazis more or less to fade into the background. At the same time, Fidesz is facing a strategic dilemma. Which is more important: its rivalry with Jobbik or the – at least partial – elective affinity between the two parties? Orbán warned prior to the election »Only Fidesz; you should not split your vote,« a comment that indicates he was thinking about the possibility that voters might par-

tially support the anti-EU Jobbik. Two days after the April 4 elections a symbolic concession was made to right-wing extremists. Despite the outrage of the Jewish community, numerous anti-fascist civil organizations, and the left-wing parties (not to mention a written promise from Orbán himself to the Jewish community), it was announced that work on a memorial in the heart of the capital would soon begin to commemorate the German occupation of (innocent) Hungary.



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*Nora Bossong*

## **Brocade and Bereavement**

### **An Excursion to Antonio Gramsci**

I am standing in front of metal bars that block the entrance to the Istituto Gramsci. I sign warns me that the grounds are under video surveillance, while the doorbell nameplate says only *fondazione*, as if they wanted to keep the true nature of the foundation secret. Cold War in Italian? In any case the grounds are more reminiscent of a place for military exercises than of a library. I can't help feeling like an enemy of the state, even though all I really want to do is take a look at three books about Antonio Gramsci's biography.

Antonio Gramsci – does the name still say anything to us? He was the co-founder and leading light of the Communist Party of Italy, and invented concepts such as civil society, cultural hegemony and the integral state, which have since become part of the inventory of political discourse.

Observations like this one ennoble the concepts, but easily allow their name-giver to fade into the background. By constructing the Communist Party as a »modern prince,« Gramsci breathed new life into Machiavelli. He also thought deeply about the function of the Party and the roll of intellectuals in society, American Fordism and French light literature, the position of the subaltern class, bourgeois society, and the proletarian revolution, just to name a few of the issues that concerned him. Undoubtedly, one can call him one of the most versatile Marxist thinkers of the twentieth century, but also one of the most unwieldy. This is the case not only because he wrote on such an abundance of topics, but also because his main work, the *Prison Notebooks* is so fragmentary. Written during his imprisonment by the fascists, it is a

convoluted volume of more than 1,000 pages, full of sketches, longer essay fragments, designs for future research projects and notes taken on his own readings.

In Germany Gramsci has passed the zenith of his popularity, which came during the 1970s. Wagenbach marketed the German version of Pier Paolo Pasolini's essay, »Scritti Corsari« (»Writings of a Pirate«). Italy was considered by the autonomous left to be a political model, the most promising attempt to put into practice a kind of socialism that would win the day with charm rather than tanks. We watched the tall Pasolini, with his serious, charismatic face, looking down at Gramsci's grave. If Anita Ekberg's dip in the Trevi Fountain embodied the *dolce vita* of the early sixties, then this man in the trench coat standing over the grave of his ghostly comrade, symbolized the *dolce lotta*, the most attractive of all the workers' struggles, at once intellectual, melancholy, and tinged with eroticism. Of course the truth is that the Italian workers' struggle was not so sweet, any more than the 1960s in Rome were all about sugar. Still, to this day Pasolini is a legend, whereas Antonio Gramsci has been largely forgotten, at least in Germany.

When I was studying cultural science, the name Gramsci did not come up even once, whereas in its American counterpart, cultural studies, as well as in postcolonial studies, Gramsci is a readily-cited source. It is evident that Gramsci would be an important reference point for theorists of postcolonialism, given his reflections on cultural hegemony, and his inquiry into the ways available to subaltern social strata to access levels of society hitherto closed to them. But Gramsci's thought is important for cultural science as well. Unlike most other thinkers of his time, he combines philological, political, and philosophical interests. Moreover, his research on popular culture and light literature has laid the groundwork for the upgrading of ordinary,

everyday life, the shift of interest from high culture to popular culture, which has been of such significance for cultural science.

And Gramsci? He is lying in bed, exhausted and under-sugared, driven by discipline and thirst for knowledge, wanting to read just one more page, and then another. In his head, his thoughts are riding a merry go round, and threatening at any moment to fall out of the car. The scene is playing out in a cold, dank room, the cheapest student quarters he was able to find, and he knows that these circumstances are not going to change anytime soon. He does not go outside, because his coat is too worn-out and he is ashamed of it. He has no one he can trust. Every evening he sits on his bed under a blanket that is too thin and glances at the door. But this door has long since ceased to be a viable connection to the outside world for him.

We might well picture a man like this as the protagonist in a Kafka story. And, as a matter of fact, Kafka and Gramsci are not only contemporaries; they are also fellow sufferers in a specific way. Both create images of the sufferings of subalterns, images that reveal bondage that has been eerily intensified. Although no one locks Gramsci's student room from the outside, his confinement is still not a figment of his imagination, and certainly not something he chose. It is a symptom of the circumstances of his suffering.

Of course, it would be going too far to see his life as an exact replica of the social crisis afflicting Italy or perhaps of backward Sardinia at the turn of the century. Some things may indeed exemplify the situation of the impoverished rural population of Sardinia, but other things are simply a matter of individual misfortune. The latter is certainly true of the fall he took when he was three years old, which – so the legend has it – stunted his growth. The effects of the fall were aggravated by the bone tuberculosis he contracted in the

*Bondage, eerily intensified*



following years. As a result, even when he was a grown man, Gramsci only stood a meter and a half tall, and his chest and back were crooked. He was increasingly treated as an alien within his own family, as if they recoiled from touching his strangely misshapen body. Kafka again comes to mind here, and with him the character Gregor Samsa, who was transformed into a beetle in a room in his parents' house, where he submissively withdrew into solitude.

Gramsci, however, could not cultivate solitude in the room he occupied at home, because his parents lived in such modest circumstances. Even when he lived in a room of his own during his student years, he was certainly no better off. On account of his exaggerated reclusiveness, accompanied by a self-mastery born of fear, he created a situation for himself as a student that uncannily resembles the one he was to endure during his decade in prison under the fascist regime: that is, the years between 1926 and shortly before his death in 1937 that were his lot in life. If one reads his letters and sketches, the descriptions begin to repeat themselves. To be sure, the constraints now come from external sources, Mussolini's agents, who arrested him, and the jailors who supervise his incarceration, as if there were any risk that this small, physically challenged man might escape from his cell. At night they awaken him over and over again in order to wear down his nervous system and completely wreck his physical constitution.

There is a second matter that repeats itself: the letters he writes home during his time as a student, imploring his father to send him a little money to buy a new coat, which always went unanswered. Gramsci felt left in the lurch, even though there were all sorts of reasons why his father, himself in serious financial trouble and overwhelmed at home by the care of his large family, could not respond favorably to his request, or perhaps felt as though it was less pressing than his own domestic

obligations. Even his mother cannot come to his aid. Sardinia is so far away from Turin that a trip to visit her son is out of the question. Gramsci remains a prisoner in his student room, driven by immense anxiety that he is not learning enough and might fail his exam, which would cause him to lose his final material anchor, the 90 lire scholarship that keeps him sane and barely fed.

And years later, incarcerated by the fascists? His political mentor, the Party, and with it Palmiro Togliatti and Joseph Stalin, proves as unwilling to help him as his real father once had. At any rate Gramsci suspects that less is being done to free him than might have been done. Worse yet, he fears that a party comrade is sending him letters that might betray him and drive him ever more deeply into the hands of the malefactors who control his fate. Is Gramsci perhaps too dangerous in the eyes of the Communist Party bosses, this little man with too sharp an intellect, this non-conforming Marxist and independent thinker? Could they be reacting in a way not unlike his own family, the members of which developed an embarrassing timidity in the presence of this strangely misshapen relative who liked to withdraw into his own mental world?

A few days after my visit to the Istituto Gramsci I am sitting in a feudal palace. There is brocade everywhere. The walls are bedecked with the finest tapestries. A conference on Gramsci's contemporary relevance is going on beneath bright chandeliers and pompous oil paintings. Among other topics, they are discussing Gramsci's reception in Latin America, his critique of democracy, and the issue of morality in Machiavelli. These are all interesting themes, yet the homogeneous outward appearance of the speakers and their audience, all older gentlemen in grey jackets, gives me pause. I look around the room and see a couple of aging ladies keeping each other company, as well as two or three



retirement-age people. All in all, the scene reminds me less of an academic event than of a meeting of veterans from the Communist Party of Italy in a royal stage set.

Bereavement and brocade: these are only two scenes, yet they stand for many others that I experienced during my research into Antonio Gramsci, and they appear to show one thing. His thought, which has continued to influence present-day debates, albeit in a fragmentary form, has to be discovered where one can reconstruct a multi-layered whole from the fragments. And, as before, that task appears to be in

the hands of the generation that discovered him – at least for themselves – in the sixties and seventies. So far there has not been a passing of the baton, or perhaps only in a rudimentary way, even though it would be a precious achievement. That is so because Gramsci's thought is highly relevant to present-day concerns, just as the conference organizers believed. Still, the stage set in which they argued so forcefully for his relevance is more and more off-putting. The time has certainly come to replace it with a new one that is more appropriate for and open to our own age.



#### **Nora Bossong**

is a writer. Her most recent book of poetry, *Sommer vor den Mauern* (*Summer before the Walls*), published by Hanser Press in 2011, was awarded the Peter Huchel Prize the following year. She has also written a new novel, *Gesellschaft mit beschränkter Haftung* (*Limited Liability Society*), which came out in 2012.

*Peter Bender*

## **The Trailblazer**

### **Pope Francis after One Year in Office**

»Qui pensiamo in secoli« – or, in English, »Here we think in centuries« – is a phrase that one constantly hears in the Vatican when one inquires about changes, reforms and current trends in the Catholic Church. Given this Vatican corporate motto, and considering the two-thousand-year history of the Church, can a single annual performance review be anything more than a quick snapshot of Pope Francis, a man still perceptibly new to the office?

By all means, Pope Francis may have inaugurated a historical turn of events in the Catholic Church comparable to and somewhat congruent with the *aggiornamento*, the opening and renovation associated with Vatican II and its Pope, John XXIII (1958-1963). Even veteran Vatican watchers agree: the new Pope has already

changed the Church, quietly but with astonishing rapidity. And, remarkably enough, quite a number of senior Church officials are suddenly going along with the reforms. Indeed, they seem transfigured. Depending on their political orientation, they refer either anxiously or hopefully to the Church's reconstruction as »papastroika.« Francis' first year in office has been a pontificate of small gestures that have had great effects.

Pope Francis is smart enough to outwit the pigeonholing mentality that would label him as a liberation theologian, a liberal, reformer, conservative, traditionalist, or revolutionary. The new Pontiff from Buenos Aires has styled himself modestly as a sinner, a pilgrim, the Bishop of Rome, and as someone who has come from the »other side of the world.«

His determination to dispense with the trappings and ceremonies of power is not incidental or contingent; rather, it defines the style and character of the way in which Francis sees his faith and his office. Leaving little doubt as to his meaning, the new Pope is supposed to have remarked that »the carnival is over,« referring to the pomp and courtly decor of the Vatican. The Pope turns up at the coffee machine in the cafeteria, sits in the last pew during worship services in the chapel, wears a tin cross, and carries a worn-out briefcase: Normalcy is a novelty; the representative of the Almighty is the hero of everyday life.

Yet Pope Francis is not content with personal symbolic gestures. His first decisions and initiatives have been like drumbeats. He has empaneled a new, high-ranking committee of personal advisors consisting of eight cardinals from all over the world (K 8) including Cardinal Marx of Munich, current chair of the Catholic German Bishops' Conference. Their assignment is to push for ecclesiastical reform. And – in an affront to the established Curia – they are also supposed to consider amendments to the Apostolic Constitution, the Church's 1988 global charter known as *Pastor bonus*. The Pope has distributed detailed questionnaires to the conferences of bishops, seeking the views of the faithful on marriage, the family, and sexual morality, and he expects realistic feedback so that he can discuss these matters seriously at the global synod of bishops to be held this fall in the Vatican. Until now this kind of outreach would have been unthinkable.

Pope Francis has also gotten involved in international politics. One of his very first official trips was to the symbolically important Italian refugee island of Lampedusa, where he shamed the political elite of Europe and criticized the EU's policy of sealing its borders. He also opposed the American scheme to launch a military attack on Syria and called for global inter-

faith prayers to bring peace to that civil war-torn country.

In the first encyclical he himself wrote, known as *Evangelii Gaudium* (*Joy of the Gospel*), the Pope used clear, descriptive language and (self-) critical images well-designed to shake up a missionary Church »in turmoil,« a »bruised« and dirty Church that ought to go out into the streets and find the people. Francis combines this rhetoric with sweeping criticism of anonymous globalization driven by untrammelled financial markets, growing inequality, and environmental destruction: »This economy is deadly!« It is also hard to overlook passages that refer to »beneficial decentralization« in the church, criticize outdated traditions, and recommend enhancing the roles of bishops and the laity, even to the point where, under some circumstances, the Pope might renounce his own power to decide doctrinal issues.

It is unlikely that Pope Francis will wear himself out dealing with topics dear to the hearts of progressive Catholics or the concerns of the *New York Review of Books* crowd such as sexual morality, definitions of marriage, celibacy, or opening the priesthood to women. Certainly, these controversial issues do have existential importance for many people and remain on the Church's agenda. But reactionaries in the Church would like nothing better than to see the new Pope get ground down by a war of attrition in the trenches of these familiar positional battles. For the traditionalists, these issues would divert attention from the real challenges facing the global Church: the internal distribution of power in its ranks; the enculturation of Christianity in the growth continents of Asia and Africa; ecumenicalism; the global dialogue among religions; the decline of Christian families as transmitters of the faith; and ongoing secularization.

Besides these issues, there are other permanent »construction sites« where the Catholic Church will have to remain engaged:

- Overcoming the »cold schism« between the clerical hierarchy and the lay faithful and between dogmas and liturgy.

- The looming threat of a split in the Church between a secularized Europe, a liberal North America, and the tradition-minded parish churches of Africa and Asia, which remain loyal to Rome (a conflict similar to the one occurring within Anglicanism over liberalization and the ordination of women).

- The Pentecostal turn, predicted by many scholars of religion, which is already underway in Francis' own home base of Latin America. Pentecostal Protestant churches are attractive to many because they offer a more individualized experience and promise socio-economic advancement to their adherents, a combination that poses special challenges to the traditional Catholic way of ministering to the poor.

- The ticking time-bomb of sexual abuse by members of the clergy. The Pope must insist upon the zero-tolerance policy instituted by his predecessor, Benedict, despite the fact that some Bishops hesitate to enforce it. This also holds true for bishops' conferences in developing and middle-income countries, where it must be applied proactively rather than dismissed as a problem peculiar to industrial countries. Only thus will it be possible to ensure that the disastrous mistakes made in the United States and elsewhere are not repeated all across the globe.

There have already been sharp replies to the Pope's questionnaire from a variety of bishops' conferences, including those in Germany, Switzerland, Austria, and Japan. The tenor of these responses can be gauged from the fact that 90 % or more of Catholics straightforwardly reject many of the Church's positions on matters such as sexual morality and marriage. For them it is just a matter of course that those dictates are mistaken. It will be interesting to see whether and how the Vatican synod of bishops scheduled for this fall deals with

these topics and what consequences those discussions may yield. The most likely outcome may be a loosening of the Church's pastoral guidelines for people who have divorced and remarried, although disappointed progressives may object that concessions on that issue are coming too little, too late. Yet there is an additional question that is still up in the air: whether and how the bishops' synod itself might conceivably evolve into a directive and collegial organ of the global Church, i.e., a sort of parliament of the world's bishops.

Some years ago the American Vatican expert Thomas Reese – also a political scientist and theologian in Washington and a Jesuit like Pope Francis – wrote a classic study entitled *Inside the Vatican*. In it he offered a detailed empirical analysis of the global Church and Papal States, complete with sober, realistic reform proposals as well as suggestions for improving efficiency in the upper echelons of the Church and ways of checking and balancing powers within it. If we modify some of his ideas about the separation of powers in the global Church and the unbundling of top Church bodies such as the Curia, the College of Cardinals, and the Synod of Bishops, developing some of his points further, and adding a few others, we would suggest structural reform along the following lines:

1. There should be a quota on the number of cardinals from the Curia who also sit in the College of Cardinals (perhaps a maximum of 25 %).

2. National bishops' conferences or perhaps bishops' synods from each continent should have a right to nominate new cardinals.

3. There should be a minimum quota on the proportion of diocesan bishops sitting in the College of Cardinals (maybe at least 50 % or 60 %).

4. The heads of religious orders from all across the globe should be included on a regular basis in the College of Cardinals.

5. Bishops' synods might be granted certain legislative prerogatives. This collegial committee should meet regularly and follow a work schedule with some continuity.

6. The nomination of bishops should be reconnected to cathedral chapters, priestly councils in the diocese, diocesan councils, and bishops from the relevant ecclesiastical provinces or national bishops' conferences.

7. The Pope should have a chief in charge of his personal cabinet.

8. The top positions in certain Vatican institutions should be given to lay people and women.

9. Papal commissions for Africa and Asia/Oceania should be created.

10. A Papal Council devoted to the spiritual guidance of the poor and grassroots communities should be re-instituted.

Reform of the Vatican's finances, a crucial, urgent matter, seems well on the way to being addressed. In the *Motu proprio* entitled *Fidelis et Dispensator Prudens*, an apostolic letter of February 24, Pope Francis announced the creation of an economic council. The new council, which will include non-clerical personnel and experts, oversees all the economic and financial institutions and activities of the Vatican and reports directly to the Pope. This was a coup on the part of the Pontiff that will, one hopes, put ecclesiastical finances on a more solid, efficient footing.

Francis' elevation to the papacy has implications that are impossible to overlook. With him, Catholic Christendom has moved beyond its traditional sphere of influence (Europe and the Mediterranean basin) and – via a »revolution from above« – become »catholic« in the original, globe-spanning sense of the word. The Vatican is

becoming more international, Latin-American, and »southern.« Evidence for this change may be found in Francis's personnel policy for the Curia and cardinals. In his first address, delivered from the balcony of St. Peter's Basilica, the Pope invoked the name of the itinerant, mendicant friar Francis as he invited the faithful to join him in traveling down a common path: »And now we begin the journey on this

*More international,  
Latin-American,  
and »southern«*

path.« Perhaps he may have recalled the familiar verses from a Spanish poem that has become widely known in Latin America as a song: »Caminante, no hay camino, se hace camino al andar« (»Wayfarer, there is no path; the path is made as you walk.«)

This is precisely the trail that Pope Francis has chosen to blaze, and upon which, following in Jesus' footsteps, he intends to take humanity. Although he is embarking on a risky path, he does so full of confidence and clarity of orientation. *Pensare in secoli?* In taking stock of Francis' first year as Pontiff, it is not as though one could construct a scale that weighed his accomplishments against matters still pending, or determine whether the glass is half or completely full. It is not like a faith freeway equipped with directional signs and guardrails; it is more like a trail into the wilderness. We have traveled only the first segment and cannot yet see what lies ahead. It is also a stretch of trail without any recognizable finish line. Rather, it has been blazed deliberately as a new stage in the journey. It is not a reform marathon with a plan; instead it is a path through life with a mission. In this sense: »*Hasta siempre, caminante*« – »Live well, wayfarer!«



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*A Conversation with Hans-Jürgen Urban*

## **»We need activity, polarizing debates, productive provocation«**

*Hans-Jürgen Urban, executive member of the board of directors of the Metal Workers Union, coined the expression »mosaic left,« a concept that has broadened the debate about a future red-red-green cooperation. In a conversation with Thomas Meyer he elucidates what he means by that term and what role he assigns to labor unions in the mosaic.*

**NG/FH:** By now, of course, the concept of a »project« has become taboo. Still, it makes sense to ask whether red-red-green has a politically meaningful project. And, if so, wouldn't it be obviously useful from the labor union perspective to encourage that project?

**Hans-Jürgen Urban:** Certainly it would be possible and even necessary. The problem is that this project can be carried out only if the actors really want it. Evidently, the three parties involved here have not been sufficiently tempted by the prospect of constructing an outpost of power politics beyond the Grand Coalition to downplay their internal battles and conflict-laden issues. But I hope that the willingness to work on this project will increase when it becomes clear that the Grand Coalition has no satisfactory answers to the important questions.

**NG/FH:** What questions do you have in mind?

**Urban:** From a labor union point of view, old age security is an especially important issue. One positive point is that the SPD has long insisted on including in the coalition agreement a renewed commitment to improved service provision to the aged. By so doing it may potentially have initiated a turnabout in old age security policy. Clear-

ly, employers and conservatives have sensed this, and that is why they are conjuring up the scenario of a decline of the West.

**NG/FH:** You coined the expression »eco-social economic democracy,« which certainly resonates with many people. What are its chief characteristics?

**Urban:** One crucial pillar of an up-to-date economic democracy is that politics should regain primacy over the economy. That primacy is something we have lost, and the ensuing consequences have been catastrophic, as one can see from the crisis of the global financial system that began in 2008 and the subsequent policies designed to contain it. Economic democracy stipulates that we should intervene in the economy when social and democratic criteria demand it. This is to be done for the sake of greater efficiency and fewer crisis-related costs, but also as a matter of democratic resistance against attempts by an economy driven by financial markets to colonize every sphere of society and government.

Co-determination in business enterprises as we know it today is an important building block of this sort of scheme. If we want to have true economic democracy, we should broaden and deepen it. But economic democracy also means finding ways to shape economic events that take place at a level beyond the individual firm. This becomes evident in the case of directed investment, an issue that has been given high priority both in the classical literature and in the reform debates of the 70s and 80s. Without the political regulation of public and private investments, there is no way to carry out mega-projects such as the turn to renewable energy, or even the promotion of a »care economy.« Therefore,

directed investment, particularly with an eye to the eco-social reconstruction of the economy, is a must. But that is more easily said than done. We are then forced to ask what we might learn from the history of the unsuccessful directed investment models of the past. We should also ask what institutional framework is best suited to allow us to influence the broader economy in democratic ways at the macro level, especially since the economy has become trans-national. What can and should economic democracy mean in the global capitalism of the twenty-first century?

To sum up, economic democracy should make it clear that we need to exert political influence on an economy that is now organized at levels above that of the individual firm, and it should recognize the importance of preserving fixed locations of economic activity and making binding rules. Of course, all this must happen under the conditions set by contemporary capitalism.

**NG/FH:** Is the modern economic democracy project getting the necessary support from individual companies and their employees?

**Urban:** Up to this point, there has not been enough support. By itself, economic democracy is not the kind of project that strikes a chord with rank and file employees. It seems too abstract and remote from their everyday problems. But above all, many people consider it unrealistic in light of the power imbalances that can be felt every day in many workplaces. Yet it is precisely that state of affairs that conceals a valuable insight: economic democracy at the macroeconomic and political levels absolutely has to be grounded upon »democratization from below.« This is necessary to prevent ossification and avert the danger of bureaucracy, as well as to lay the groundwork for its broad acceptance. Toward that end we have introduced the idea of »demo-

cratic work.« Democratic work is good work designed to promote health and personal development, but also to ensure that employees have opportunities to exert direct influence on their working conditions. Thus, whereas policies that embody economic democracy foresee intervention in the economy »from above,« the idea of democratic work imagines democracy as it would be seen »from below.«

**NG/FH:** You have coined the notion of the »mosaic left« with an eye to possible cooperation among the three parties of the left. That would likely imply that each participant would make its own unique contribution, but only the ensemble would yield a coherent picture. Now many Greens probably belong in the neo-bourgeois camp. They earn fairly high incomes, and, when in doubt, probably lean toward keeping ownership relations as they are in spite of their slightly leftist cultural predilections. The Party of the Left is internally divided, since many of its members have learned the lesson from European experiences that a party can best preserve its standing by remaining in opposition. And in the case of the SPD, the new opening has not yet taken full effect; it is still only an intention. How could these three tiles of the mosaic be put together so as to yield a single image?

**Urban:** To begin with, the image of a mosaic should indicate that the hoped-for cooperation is not to be understood merely as a crossover project in the traditional sense. The idea of a mosaic means that the potential partners should be motivated to cross over, but – just as importantly – that they should try to set the stage for cooperation in their own houses. More concretely, anybody who would like to have a left-wing mosaic, whether s/he belongs to the Greens, the Left, or the SPD, must work openly and tenaciously to enable the party in question to fit into the mosaic.



**NG/FH:** Can you make that point more specific? What would that mean for each of the parties?

**Urban:** Because it is the party that generally wins the most votes among the three, the SPD would be in demand as the institutional center of a red-red-green alliance, but at this point it is neither willing nor able to become part of the mosaic. Above all, it has to take credible, practical steps to free itself from the Babylonian captivity to Agenda 2010 policies. It must adopt alternative policies on a credible and permanent basis; otherwise, it will never be able to climb out of the credibility hole it has dug for itself among its potential voter base. But it will not do merely to negate the policies of Agenda 2010. The vision of a social democracy for the twenty-first century is not simply the antipode of that Agenda, but rather a new vision of reform with new answers. If I am not mistaken, the party has not been doing much work on this.

Right now, the Greens have traveled farthest from a left-wing project. There is no empirical evidence that the rhetoric of justice was responsible for the party's poor showing in the last election. Nevertheless, that claim served as the justification for emasculating politically the »leftish« wing of the party. It looks as if many Greens would like to turn their party into a kind of economically liberal, green FDP. As I see it, the Greens need to have a debate that would culminate in making the ecology issue the heart of their identity as a party, but would also tie the ecology paradigm more closely to the debate about »ecological equality« on a global scale. This is so because issues such as environmental depletion and stress have long since been discussed as criteria of global justice. There is an inalienable human right to keep nature intact. That kind of debate suits the culture of the green movement and could furnish the party with a new, unique »selling point.«

The Party of the Left could distinguish itself as the moving force behind a modern critique of capitalism. To accomplish that, it would be helpful for the Left to maintain a strict pro-welfare-state orientation with overtones of class politics. The starting point for this is the fact that social-and ecological-progress is a conflict-laden issue involving power. But, from the standpoint of an updated class perspective, it would be indispensable for the Left to champion the cause of all those who depend on wages for their livelihood: the core work force in the industrial sector, but also the unemployed and people with precarious jobs. There is sometimes a cultural chasm here that would have to be bridged.

**NG/FH:** But if all these parties are now going to toe the same line, so to speak, they could no longer aggregate the distinct social forces needed to attain overall majorities, and this is true not only in elections. For the SPD it might make sense to graze in the pastures of the so-called middle, to win over those of its members which the other parties cannot reach. Above all else, the three parties would obviously have to attract different elements and milieus of society, and the SPD would have to be the one that builds bridges among these.

**Urban:** Yes, I have tried to suggest the shadings of policy that might distinguish the parties, but of course they would all have to be compatible with one another. When it comes to party policy, the core of each »brand« must be differentiated, yet there must be shared visions that hold them all together. In other words, what is at stake here is a model that foresees a division of labor within the common leftist mosaic, one that makes room for each party to preserve its own profile while also enabling a distinctive profile to emerge for the common project itself.

For parties that want to sharpen their political profile, it is especially important



to come to grips with the democracy problem. The mosaic parties have to find an answer to the declining respect in which all parties are held. People no longer feel sufficiently represented by their political deputies, whether they are conservative, leftist, or social-democratic. Clientele parties such as the FDP, which anyway only represent tiny economic elites, have fewer problems on this score. Catch-all parties or an alliance of left-wing parties that aspire to get closer to the needs and desires of the people will fail unless they address that problem.

**NG/FH:** Are these ideas even remotely capable of generating a consensus in the ranks of German labor unions? Shortly before he left office, Michael Sommer emphasized once again that the experiences of the past few years evidently have reinforced the stance of neutrality vis-à-vis party politics taken by the united labor unions. Can they play the role of mediator or catalyst in bringing about cooperation between the political left and center?

**Urban:** This discussion has not yet advanced very far in the labor unions. The dominant mood has been to take a pragmatic approach toward each of the individual parties, depending on the precise nature of the issue at hand. Yet even though debates and policy positions have been lacking so far, the unions could still do some things to move us closer to the emergence of a mosaic left.

As I see it, the labor unions would be most useful as an engine driving social activism, i.e., as an actor that gets society moving by going on the offensive and showing a willingness to fight politically for the interests of those they represent. The idea is to foment productive unrest, so that we may finally begin talking about the outlook for the post-Grand Coalition era. Where wage and social policies are concerned, unions should perhaps become more vociferous in raising the issue

of distribution and treating it as the crux of their new project. Here the issue is defining a just distribution of income, wealth, social opportunities, and environmental depletion. Specific demands and reform strategies would have to be developed and then brought to the attention of the parties with a renewed sense of their gravity. The prestige of labor unions has been on the rise in recent years, probably because of the credit or recognition they got from almost everyone for their role in resolving the great crisis of financial capitalism. Maybe they could make use of this »recognition capital« in coming debates.

**NG/FH:** How might that look from a methodological standpoint?

**Urban:** This is how it might happen: instead of just making demands and laying out a politics based on solidarity, the unions could also arrange the venues and dates for the debates. They could provide the potential mosaic partners with a quasi-neutral site in order to support the process of mutual accommodation. Here I am thinking of activities along the lines of the unions' traditional »congresses for the future,« but now we would have congresses to promote mutual understanding among the participants in the mosaic left. At the same time, we should not forget that the unions and parties have already set up their own foundations capable of staging debates and preparing congresses.

**NG/FH:** Until 1989 the unions always played a prominent role in shaping social policy, both intellectually and practically. Somehow, that seems to have ended rather abruptly. The unions' withdrawal probably has to do with processes of globalization and with the fact that the left and/or left-wing thought generally has been forced into a defensive posture. Could the unions imagine playing the role of avant-garde thinkers again, perhaps in a different form?

**Urban:** The process of mutual accommodation within the mosaic left requires that all the participants in the mosaic keep evolving. That is true of the unions as well. In recent years they have been confronted with severe structural problems ranging from the erosion of collective labor agreements, unemployment, and a precarious labor market to declines in membership and financial resources. In response to these problems, the unions made vigorous efforts to halt the membership decline and maintain organizational power. The membership issue was the top priority; accordingly, new organizational schemes were developed. For the most part these strategies have worked. In marked contrast to other unions in Europe, German unions have restored stability in many sectors. But this success was accompanied by a certain focusing of resources on and strategic attention to the membership issue. That sort of thing can rapidly lead to the neglect and even loss of the ability to think in broader terms. And when unions no longer have a clear vision of how urgent problems ought to be addressed, they can quickly lose interest in matters of grand political strategy – at least unless countermeasures are taken! For labor unions, fitting into the mosaic would mean going beyond policies that merely stabilize their organizations. They would have to enhance their ability to think in broad conceptual terms and put a higher value on political mandates. The short version of all this might be: »revitalization through repoliticization.«

**NG/FH:** The SPD's main problem has always been how to win over the consistent support of many diverse socio-cultural milieus, for without doing so it could not even come close to becoming a majority party. The labor unions, by contrast, have managed to attract quite diverse occupational groups and cultural sectors as well as the social milieus that are relevant to the kind of politics we have been discus-

sing. So are they perhaps in a position to build the bridges needed to mobilize support within society for the SPD?

**Urban:** Yes, but within limits. The metaphor of a mosaic is also supposed to suggest that it is not always a good idea to look for »all purpose« actors that can incorporate every position and interest. Maybe such actors do not even exist anymore in the highly differentiated societies of modern-day capitalism. Perhaps the more urgent task may be to develop networks and communicative structures within civil society.

**NG/FH:** When it comes to social policy, the IG Metal Union of course has traditionally spearheaded a more strongly leftist current of thought. Should we expect other important unions to support a good deal of what might be seen as mosaic-left ideas?

**Urban:** As we know, German unions have been independent and broadly integrative for sound historical reasons; thus, they have always gone their own separate ways when taking political positions. That will not change in the foreseeable future. So to that extent they will never »speak with one voice.« There will always be differences of nuance and emphasis. But I believe that, where central issues of future policymaking are concerned, it may well be possible for different unions to develop a shared outlook. There certainly has been some encouraging evidence that this is happening. For example, issues such as the reconstruction of industry along ecological lines, the energy makeover, and the future of public services affect quite different interests and carry different risks for the individual unions that belong to the DGB (The Federation of German Labor Unions, ed.). Nevertheless, they have been open to all these issues and are trying to find a future-oriented role for themselves. They do not want to be seen merely as defenders of the structural status quo. Sometimes

this has been a bumpy ride, but the will is there, and that is encouraging.

**NG/FH:** Isn't this really a job for the DGB?

**Urban:** The DGB does indeed have a role to play here, because its proper mandate is to take on issues at the interfaces of its member unions. But it would be too much to ask of the DGB to handle all such issues. So it is more likely that it will act as a moderator or mediator among the big unions rather than as a spearhead. Still, it could be extremely important for the Federation to initiate processes and offer its own input. But what really counts is whether majorities can be found in the member unions for DGB initiatives.

**NG/FH:** Are there any indications that things are moving in this direction?

**Urban:** I believe so, especially since we have managed to stabilize the organizational power of the labor unions and stop the imminent free fall in membership numbers. The unions will become increasingly willing to take on this issue. In terms of the economic situation, Germany still has a somewhat anomalous position. The crisis

that has gripped Southern Europe, which is partly the result of crippling austerity policies and remains very worrying, still has not arrived in Germany. But as soon as this country's economic boom comes to an end, it will quickly become clear that the grand themes of European integration, especially the euro-crisis, have not been resolved even in Germany.

In my opinion neither the parties nor the unions are on the cutting edge when it comes to these matters. But that is another – and very difficult – story. I just want to say this much: I believe it is absolutely necessary to work with »productive provocations« in the debate about a progressive crisis strategy in Germany and the EU. There is an ever thicker layer of mildew forming on German society due to the governing style and approach to problem-solving adopted by Angela Merkel and her circle. In this kind of climate there is no room for political creativity and the courage to launch social reforms. In the final analysis, a mosaic left would face the task of fomenting discursive unrest by disseminating a pro-European critique of Europe in society and in political arenas, just to get things moving again. We need activity, polarizing debates, productive provocation.

*Michael Dauderstädt*

## **Back to Marx: Capitalism in the Twenty-first Century**

### **Thomas Piketty's Shocking Conclusions about Growing Inequality**

Thomas Piketty is one of the leading scholars working in the areas of inequality and wealth. His studies, which exposed the shockingly unequal distribution of wealth in America, inspired the Occupy Movement and its slogan, »We are the 99 %.« Piketty has now produced a *magnum opus* entitled *Le Capital au XXI<sup>e</sup> Siècle* (*Capital*

*in the Twenty-first Century*), which sums up the results of his previous research. The book offers not only exhaustive data and economic analyses, but also critiques of existing scholarship, all imbedded in a broader context of social and political trends. In addition, one can consult his website, [piketty.pse.ens.fr/capital21c](http://piketty.pse.ens.fr/capital21c) which

contains a wealth of statistical material and technical analyses. Piketty's conclusion is dramatic: Capitalism is regressing toward patterns of wealth distribution comparable to those that prevailed in Karl Marx's day. In that era the capital stock of France and Great Britain had a value seven to eight times greater than their respective national incomes. For the world as a whole the ratio was more like four or five to one. In the United States, wealth grew more slowly and did not reach its zenith of five times the value of national income until 1930, later than in Europe.

Two World Wars, the Great Depression, a more egalitarian tax system, and high post-WW II growth reduced that ratio to three-to-one between 1910 and 1950-1960, although in the United States it remained at four-to-one. Since then, the wealth gap has begun to widen again, and has evidently been approaching figures last seen in the nineteenth century. During the previous twenty-five years, the richest one-hundred-millionth of the world's population (i.e., roughly 70 people) has increased its share of global wealth fourfold. Today 1,400 billionaires hold 1.5 % of the world's wealth.

Looking ahead to the twenty-first century, Piketty forecasts that levels of inequality characteristic of the nineteenth century, as depicted in the novels of Honoré de Balzac and Jane Austen (whom he likes to quote), will yet be exceeded. Two mechanisms are driving this process. First, growth rates are in long-term decline, since rates of population increase rates are slowing and the catch-up growth typical of poorer countries like China is no longer paying such high dividends. For that reason, the rate of return on capital will noticeably exceed GDP growth rates. Second, the distribution of income between capital and labor, already adverse to the latter, will shift further in favor of capital.

But there are other factors accelerating these trends: Even today wealth is concentrated in the hands of a few, and that ten-

dency will only gain momentum in future years. Inequality is becoming especially acute towards the apex of the wealth pyramid. This is so because the savings rate and the rate of return are higher for the super-rich than

### *Higher returns for the super-rich*

they are for middle-income people. Inheritance constitutes an ever growing share of incomes. As in the nineteenth century, inheritance makes up nearly a quarter of total income (inheritance plus work), whereas during the period between 1900 and 1930 it only accounted for 10 %. Wealth is profitable even without entrepreneurship. In a span of just twenty years (1990-2010) the heiress to the L'Oréal fortune, Liliane Bettencourt, was able to multiply her two billion dollar fortune more than tenfold, to 25 billion, an annual rate of return of about 13 % (nominal) or 10-11 % (real). By comparison, Bill Gates of Microsoft increased his fortune in the same period from four to fifty billion dollars.

If we focus on wages and salaries alone, the gap has been increasing as well, especially in the Anglo-Saxon countries. There, the distribution of personal income has become more unequal quite apart from the drop in overall wage rates. A new managerial class is emerging, whose incomes do not quite boost its members to the top of the wealth pyramid, but bring them quite close to it. This affluent group of middle-income earners within the top 10 % represents a new departure that distinguishes the twenty-first century from the nineteenth. Nevertheless, the true »workers' share« of wages and salaries within national income has to be adjusted downward. Traditional countervailing powers such as labor unions, a redistributive welfare state, and the taxation necessary to sustain the latter have been weakened considerably due to globalization and the competitive »race to the bottom« in setting tax rates.

Accordingly, Piketty predicts that capital stocks will continue to increase relative

to GDP, reaching a ratio of over 600 %, i.e., six or seven times more than annual national income, a level higher than that which existed even in the nineteenth century. Likewise, the concentration of wealth will keep increasing, while the share allotted to labor will continue to decline. So by 2050 the 1,400 billionaires mentioned above will presumably hold 7.2 % of global wealth. By 2100, they would have 59.6 % if present trends continue. It is easy to imagine the repercussions of that trend for the economy, society, and politics. Social justice and the work ethic would suffer. What Joseph Stiglitz referred to as the »price of inequality« would intensify and take on global dimensions. Certainly, a new Great Depression or wars such as the twentieth century witnessed could stop such an evolution. But what is truly unsettling in Piketty's analysis is the way in which he uses very long-term data to support it, data that reflect secular trends and the fundamental law-like patterns of capitalist accumulations.

Despite all this Piketty does not abandon hope. He follows up his cries of alarm by proposals to regulate capital. The crux of his reforms would involve the progressive taxation of wealth and inheritance. Preferably, such taxes would be levied on a global scale and would be fortified by international data-exchanges designed to prevent wealth from slipping through the net of taxation. Piketty is fully aware of the political hurdles that would have to be surmounted, since one would expect the most powerful elites on the planet to resist tooth and nail. But even a limited European initiative would be a step in the right direction.

The crisis in the financial markets have furnished new reasons and pressure for the regulation of wealth. Piketty advocates reducing sovereign debt by imposing a

progressive capital levy. To be sure, inflation would also reduce the real value of wealth holdings; however, such a step would hit the holders of monetary wealth much harder than the holders of tangible assets (land, real estate, corporations/securities). On principle, Piketty favors taxation rather than debt as the chief source of state financing. The rough model he designs for Europe includes a tax exemption for fortunes of up to one million euros. After that, holders of large fortunes would pay a tax of 1 % on wealth valued at one to five million euros, and 2 % on all wealth greater than that amount. This progressive wealth tax would affect 2.5 % of all households and would bring in annual tax revenues equivalent to about 2 % of Europe's GDP.

Social Democrats, especially, should take a serious look at Piketty's analysis. It is their values, and the interests of their clientele groups, that are threatened by the trends. Conversely, disadvantaged and propertyless people constitute the overwhelming majority of humanity. Yet this majority certainly does not overwhelm anyone, least of all the super-rich elite, when it ignores this inegalitarian trend and its members fail to coalesce in opposition to it. Enlightenment is the first step, but it must be followed by other ones. Piketty contributes to this kind of enlightenment in the tradition of the French Revolution. In fact, he uses the first article of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen as the motto of his book.

*Thomas Piketty: Le Capital au XXI<sup>e</sup> Siècle (Capital in the Twenty-first Century). Seuil, Paris, 2013, 970 pages, 17.99 euros; (English version) Harvard University Press, 2014, 685 pages, 30.95 euros.*

*In October C.H. Beck Press will be issuing a German edition.*



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