

North-Atlantic Left Dialogue

November 9, 2008 - Berlin



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Questions

What are the chief strengths and weaknesses of the European and north-American lefts now (please be sure to locate their strengths!)? What are the major opportunities for strengthening the lefts in both regions now?

How do we deal with the contradictions between the socialist left, centrist social democracy and the civil-society movements?

What are the key new programmatic components of a left strategy that might enable a revived left to avoid the previous decline of the traditional left?

How exactly can and should the left in each region help the left in the other regions? And, regarding the specific project at hand - the present seminar -, where does it go from here? What is its potential?

Answers

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Invitation to a North-Atlantic Left Dialogue – November 9, 2008 - Berlin

This seminar is an attempt to develop a continuous working relationship between left and socialist intellectuals and academics in Europe (starting with Germans and Italians) and North America (USA/Canada) for the purpose of discussing the distinctive challenges to the political, social and cultural left working and struggling in the highly developed northern capitalist countries. One of the results we hope to achieve is to establish reform demands which are feasible and appropriate for countries at a comparable stage of development. There are already some intellectual/academic connections between us by way of journals like the "Socialist Register" and "Transform" or conferences like the "Left Forum", "Rethinking Marxism" or "Historical Materialism". The debates occurring in these journals and conferences motivated us¹ to propose what would begin as an annual workshop, whose venue alternates between Europe and the U.S. We would aim at expanding this cooperation as part of the renewal of the global left in the 21st century. If we succeed, we will have created something new.

In this first seminar of the series, developing trust and a sense of common interest among participants, institutions and projects is especially important. It is a one-day-event, but is followed by a public conference "After Bush" in Berlin and we are pleased that many of us can take part in both events and in some cases in another very important event in celebration of Peter Marcuse on his 80th birthday. In the future, we would like to devote a full weekend to our workshop.

The conference "After Bush" will include questions of what the strategic options of the ruling class are and may become (in the context of cleavages within North-Atlantic ruling circles, as for example the division represented by McCain and Obama) and of what hegemonic crises are developing (e.g. the energy crisis) which could motivate similar cleavages

¹ Ingar Solty, Rick Wolff, Eric Canepa, Rainer Rilling, Michael Brie, Jan Rehmman, Bill Tabb, Margit Mayer.

among them. What the options of the elite are is crucial to left strategy, as are hegemonic crises. However, we are taking advantage of the complementarity between the conference and the seminar, such that the rare opportunity the seminar provides of proposing reform demands within a strategic socialist trajectory is not crowded out by the enormous, and very actual, problem of what the ruling elites are thinking and planning.

We are trying to cut the questions down to the bone so that people may concentrate on the essence of the topic. We are sending out 4 questions, asking for answers not exceeding 5 pages in total; participants may want to focus on certain questions but please respond to all of them and return them to the organising group (*ercanepa@gmail.com*) by October 13th, so that we may send them out before the seminar to all participants (we will also need time to translate some of the responses). We will discuss each question for 1 ½ hours, with an opening debate between two persons from the US and Germany (Italy), not longer than 15 minutes; an open discussion follows, each contribution is limited to 5 minutes; each session will then close with a 5-minute concluding comment. We begin at 10 am and come to an end at 7pm. At 8 pm we invite you to spend the evening together with us at a near-by restaurant.

Our questions:

1. **What are the chief strengths and weaknesses of the European and north-American lefts now (please be sure to locate their strengths!)? What are the major opportunities for strengthening the lefts in both regions now?**

That is, for example: what problems or crises in European and north-American capitalism and what power shifts offer the greatest opportunities for left political gains now? One example: Given the spreading economic crisis of global capitalism, what are the best ways for European and US leftists now to (a) strengthen themselves (b) help each other, and (c) formulate a shared programmatic response to that crisis different from the emerging (or hegemonic) reformist and dominant neoliberal responses? Does the spreading economic crisis offer the left an historic opportunity, in Europe and in the US, to reconfigure the relationship between the political and the social left? Could this reconfiguration mean reuniting the currently dispersed single-issue movements, social movements, etc. (i.e., feminist, anti-racist, environmentalist, poor people's movements, immigrants rights movements, etc.) into a new political unity respectful of its constituents' differences yet cohesive enough to contest for social hegemony? What strategic conclusions can be drawn from the fact that many of the social movements either no longer exist (as revolutionary/socialist movements) - because of co-optation, institutionalisation and/or collapse - or were founded on or still revolve around notions of strictly extra-parliamentarian action and refuse to enter political society? How do we address their partial successes *and* their failures, i.e. the failure of their strategies, such that we can rebuild them in a transformative way? Are we dealing with a crisis of the purely social left (i.e. those unwilling to enter political society) and is there therefore a new relevance of the *political* sphere for anti-capitalist class building and hegemony construction strategies? How do we respond to the question of organisation, which has re-emerged in response to the lack of political (party) articulations within the contemporary left: is there a new type of left organising and organisation? (In this regard, what conclusions can be drawn from the successes of new political parties such as the German Die LINKE or the Dutch Socialist Party and the

demise of the political Left in France, Spain and Italy?) And finally: What social groups (classes? segments of a working class? others? all of the above?) are the best "target" subjects for building a stronger left now in both regions? (10am-12 am)

2. **How do we deal with the contradictions between the socialist left, centrist social democracy and the civil-society movements?**

That is: We would like to debate the contradictory relationship within the left. For example: the contradictions between leftist (social movement based) opposition and governmental participation has not yet been successfully navigated, let alone resolved. Even the most interesting and most "dialectical" strategies to try to practice both at the same time (e.g. by organising demonstrations in France and Italy against the "left" government) were not successful in the end. This experience leads again and again to the re-emergence of the traditional polarisation of social and political forces (mere reformism versus sectarian revolutionarism) that needs to be overcome and resolved into a "revolutionary Realpolitik" (Luxemburg). Will the present logic of social and political developments legitimise a left socialist strategy or will a revived centre-left (e.g. Partito Democratico in Italy, traditional Democratic National Committee politics in the USA, centrist wing of SPD in Germany) result? Is the latter possibility a threat to, or a partially positive factor for, the socialist left - and consequently what would be the best strategy of a socialist left toward such a revival of the centre-left? How probable is a stable revival of the centre-left in the highly developed northern capitalist countries? What basic theoretical commitments and strategic goals should today define the difference between *revolutionary* Realpolitik and the centrist social democratic or reformist kinds of Realpolitik (for example, the difference between a left populism, which focuses mostly on election results and "quantitative" short-term successes, and an approach which revolves around a project of class building with hegemonic ambitions reaching out to the "productive classes" and social forces with "subjectively contradictory class positions")? Are those strategic goals sufficient to enable tactical alliances with the centre-left that do not weaken us and our basic social-transformative project? In what ways have alliances with these centre-left forces jeopardised the credibility of the socialist left and under what circumstances can political leverage as well as credibility be maintained? Given the politi-

cal situation today in Europe and the US, what are the realistic prospects for (a) building a left that will embrace those strategic goals, and (b) building tactical alliances – electoral and extra-electoral – with the centrist social democrats and reformists? Are there specific demands (see below) that offer opportunities for building such tactical alliances now? (1pm-3pm)

3. **What are the key new programmatic components of a left strategy that might enable a revived left to avoid the previous decline of the traditional left?**

That is: How can the left enable itself to formulate its programmes and demands (long, middle, short-term) on the level of the existing finance-driven High-Tech-Capitalism? How can it develop the vision of a socialist society that is based on the "progress" of the forces of production, turning their potentials against the "fetters" of the private-profit system? **What are the first reform demands - please restrict to 4 to 7 specific ones - you think feasible in your country**, which would get people to question capital's apparently self-evident right to organise production and distribution of goods and services, obtain some kind of result, empower and politicise people, get people to see beyond a society dominated by capital and beyond wage labour and free-lance labour's frantic competitive subjugation to capital? (3:30 - 5pm)

4. **How exactly can and should the left in each region help the left in the other regions? And, regarding the specific project at hand - the present seminar -, where does it go from here? What is its potential?** (5.30pm – 7 pm).

Stanley Aronowitz

1. In the wake of the virtual collapse of the European Center-Left and the almost complete victory of the Center-Right in France and Germany and the far Right in Italy, the most hopeful development has been the emergence in Germany of the Left Party. Although its program, as far as I can tell, is entirely within the "modern" Social-Democratic orbit (resistance to welfare state cuts, defense of human rights, incorporation of ecological demands, and opposition to US empire-building and the supine response of nearly all European governments,-- including Britain's Labor government--), in these uncertain times, Obama notwithstanding, this provides a counterweight to efforts elsewhere to accommodate the Left to the Center-Right. In France, the alliance of the so-called "far Left" parties is also important. In both instances, at least at the electoral level, they provide an alternative to the failed center-left parties of government. At the same time, there does not seem to be a clear anti-capitalist, much less an imaginative programmatic thrust in any of the Left alliances. Fear of the Right, caution about sectarianism and lack of radical imagination pervades the European as well as the United States Left.

As for the United States the accommodation of most of the Left to the Democratic Party, their hopes for Obama and the possibility that he will lead a Center-Left government, expressed in the illusion that his administration would introduce a "new New Deal", has further marginalized the Left. At the minimum even the pro-Obama skeptics argue that his election will consolidate a new "mood" for reform. Those who dissent from this position are without an articulate voice in the public sphere-, notwithstanding the remainder: grouplets stemming from the ancient Trotskyist and discredited Maoist movements. The Left has no national press of its own and, most important, no fresh non-sectarian political formation that credibly is free of the taint of the Stalinist, sectarian or moderate liberal past. Some of the small formations have newspapers, but they reek of sectarianism. In some instances, they have done effective trade union, anti-Iraq war and civil liberties work, but rarely, if ever in their own name, a sign that they tacitly acknowledge their lack of credibility. The CP and its split off, the Committees of Correspondence(whose

active membership is largely over 60 years old) have little penetration in popular movements and have openly joined the Obama campaign, the most visible expression of which is Progressives for Obama which numbers among its adherents some independent Leftists, and activists in the left of the Democratic Party. They have mobilized some, but have had little impact on either Obama's rhetoric or his program. What is lacking however, is a popular national Left Press, let alone a visible electoral expression of an alternative to the Center and the Right. The main hope of the Left seems to be that a different kind of debate would ensue from a prospective Obama victory, a debate that will no longer be directed at defensive struggles against efforts to further weaken the already enfeebled welfare state and to prevent a wider war in the Middle East, but a new push for substantive change.

Needless to say, the economic bust of the past year, but especially the financial meltdown this fall, has radically altered the framework of electoral politics. Despite his campaign's steadfast refusal to enter the economy debate with really bold new proposals, (he voted for the Bush administration's \$780 billion bank bailout) Obama's prospects were boosted so that (in late October) he was favored by polls and pundits alike to win the presidency, but by no means assured of victory. Democrats and progressives shivered at the prospect that *race* might sink his almost assured election and there was some evidence that a fraction of the white electorate might vote for McCain or, in the best of circumstances, stay away from the polls. The unions have spent \$200 million in Obama's behalf, especially in important "battleground" states such as Ohio, Pennsylvania and Virginia. At the same time perhaps a majority of "ruling class" forces aligned, together with organized labor and social movement organizations, with the Obama campaign. Major investors such as Warren Buffett declared for Obama, General Colin Powell endorsed him, and so have large corporate newspapers such as the New York Times, Los Angeles Times and Chicago Tribune, because of their fear that the Right would be obliged by its ideological commitments as well as its own ineptitude to sabotage needed re-regulation of large segments of the economy, especially the financial sector.

It is increasingly clear that whatever the outcome of the election, a program that resembles the "first" New Deal is in the offing, that is, considerable business regulation; a new push to corporatism in which workers and their unions would be urged, cajoled and even coerced, to grant further concessions to Capital in the "national in-

terest"; a "kinder, gentler" program of Empire building that might abandon unilateral military aggression (but not aggression as such); and, in the wake of mounting unemployment, there will be some initially feeble efforts at work programs, particularly rebuilding the dilapidated infrastructure such as roads, bridges and the like. A substantial "bail out" to workers and middle class victims of the crisis is by no means assured, although more assistance to financial capital is more than likely as the crisis deepens. For the mood of anger and resistance has not yet reached a level where mass direct action is likely, at least in the short run. The key struggles of the next period will be for universal health care and probably strengthened pension guarantees for workers as corporations abandon supplements to the social security system, a serious program to overcome the housing crisis that has witnessed millions of foreclosed homes, and for massive government investment away from defense spending that is generally capital-intensive towards construction and service investment that is labor-intensive. After the election there will likely be renewed protest to end the Iraq war by withdrawal of US combat forces from the country, but Obama is not going to end US military intervention entirely.

But the main task of the Left is to rebuild itself so that these reform struggles will have a chance of winning and, more to the point, Americans will be offered a clear alternative to failed neo-liberal politics of past and present. It is abundantly clear that the Center is unlikely to follow through on demands to shift the burden of the crisis on Capital, and without a prod, the labor leadership is ideologically incapable of doing so, for a variety of reasons. (In this regard we are witnessing the birth of new forms of labor organization, especially among new immigrant groups, in which contracts and traditional union structures are not the focus of organizing). Where will protest and resistance stem from if not a new Left political formation and the independent non-coopted fractions of the social movements, especially immigrants? Where will the anti-capitalist thrust of reform struggles be made visible? Where will the counter-hegemonic intellectual forces be positioned, a counter-hegemony capable of offering an alternative explanation for the crisis, but also a program that goes beyond the traditional welfare state which, it must be recalled, failed to reverse the Great Depression, even as it succeeded in winning ideological hegemony? These are the tasks.

With respect to parliamentary (electoral and legislative) action, apart from a relatively small group of anarchists and left-communists, disdain for these forms has evaporated. The main dan-

ger today is that the extra-electoral movements initiated by feminist, environmental and more recently global justice protests, have evaporated or are in slumber. The economic crisis has been met on the broad left—including labor and social movements—largely with hopes that a Democratic victory can bring new gains, reverse Bush's reckless and failed war policies, and change US economic prospects which, at the moment, promise to sink further. The outpouring of Obama volunteers and the enthusiasm for his campaign indicates that a basis exists for a new politics. In the eventuality either that he wins and betrays that hope, or that he loses, we are likely to experience considerable disillusionment among the thousands of young activists who have joined the campaign. If this occurs the main danger is that they will return to a privatized, cynical existence rather than embracing a new radicalism which does not yet exist.

2. The "social" Left has to a large extent been on the defensive for the past fifteen years, dating from Clinton's administration. They succeeded in preserving abortion rights, made significant progress in restoring ecological understanding—with the assistance of Al Gore and scientists who have warned us about the dire consequences of global climate change). At the same time, the black Freedom movement has been virtually silenced since the Clinton presidency and especially since Obama's ascendancy, a testament to the vagaries of identity politics. As for feminism, similarly the Hillary campaign was accompanied by the liberal celebration that women could break the "glass ceiling" as they have done in Europe. The bitterness that followed her defeat in the primaries, could have wrecked the Obama campaign, but didn't. Still, the problem now on the social left is similar to the labor left and the ideological left. On the assumption that Obama has won, will the next period witness a damping down of direct, extra-parliamentary action on the premise that it will endanger Obama's prospects to change the priorities in Washington? But even if he doesn't, the same fears will pervade the social, labor and ideological lefts. First discouraged by September 11, then by the patriotic fervor that accompanied the Iraq war, protest has visibly declined in the United States, even as we have experienced the steady erosion of social gains. The main problem remains the profound integration of the putative opposition within the Democratic Party and corporate liberalism.
3. a) more than four hundred and fifty unions, doctors and other health organizations and a sizeable minority with the Democratic Party's

delegation have endorsed Congressional legislation to establish a universal health care system similar to the one that now exists for older Americans: Medicare. Obama is currently for a plan that will provide a health care program through private insurance companies. This may be the first serious fight in the new Congress.

b) nationalize banks, a measure that is already half way there. Provide significant labor and community representation on their boards. Co-determination might also be enacted for any corporation such as General Motors that seeks government bailout funds. This is only "radical" in the US context

c) immediate withdrawal of US troops from Iraq and renounce military action against Iran.

d) The Democrats have avoided an urban program in the electoral campaign. Against gentrification, which has driven millions of workers, including blacks and Latinos from center-cities, the Left should advocate for the cities under the slogan The Right to the City, This means, in the first place, anti-eviction and anti-luxury housing struggles; second a massive infusion of capital into the cities for new moderate priced housing, schools and street repair under popular control. Third, significant democratic reform to encourage wider participation in civil society and urban policy;

e. A reindustrialization program. Obama has promised 5 million "green jobs", chiefly for revamping our energy resources. This means such activities as solar, geothermal, windmill energy and his nefarious endorsement of "clean coal", an oxymoron. Clean energy is a major demand that would move the US away from its reliance on oil and natural gas. But if the tens of thousands of jobs in the car industry are to be restored, they should not be devoted chiefly to building cars. These plants, some of them shuttered, can be the sites for ecologically sound production. And they should be reopened as workers cooperatives rather than be returned to private capital.

e) repeal "No Child Left Behind" Bush's rightwing education program and develop a new national education program that moves the US away from the politics of control to a politics of learning.

f) restore the guaranteed income program enacted by the new Deal but signed away by Bill Clinton.

g) Strengthen labor relations laws to guarantee workers rights

h) grant citizenship to the 12 million undocumented immigrants, who live within US borders in fear and have been selectively deported by government agents.

4. This conference is a good beginning, We need regular contact across national boundaries among parties and social movements on the Left; an international press; a "secretariat" that coordinates information about inter-national actions. A discussion across boundaries through listservs; And periodic face-to face conferences and seminars, held in different regions of the globe.

Marco Berlinguer

Question 1

Forces: The crisis of neoliberalism - announced by the emergence of the movement against neoliberalist globalisation - is by now a deep and a radical one. It opens up enormous spaces in terms of the development of movements and of new critical thinking. The dramatic crisis underway and capitalism's need for strong state intervention will have a "politicising" effect; economy and money will return as fields of political contestation. The crisis of the hegemony and legitimation of the ruling political and economic classes will become more radical.

We are in a phase of movement and of upturn, and many conflicts (within single counties and at an international level) will be unleashed. The younger generations are developing a critical conscience, if only through necessity. Contradictions are opening up in the hegemonic social bloc and one can image the formation of new social coalitions.

In recent years, new relations and fertile mixtures at the level of international movements have been established, and we have seen the embryonic formation of a new critical thinking. There is a thrust toward more systemic critical approaches.

Weaknesses: There is an ever deeper crisis - a degeneration - of political systems. Politics has become mediatised. Representative democracy is in decline. National states have seen a process of authoritarian involution (in new forms) and have been structurally weakened. The ideas and forms of classical political action have not worked for some time now. There is a profound lack of faith in the political realm. Social and cultural fragmentation, individualism and even enmity are growing. There is the lack of a project, of a unifying vision and of adequate organisational forms for the reconstruction of unity and cooperation within the new historical and anthropological conditions. The workers have lost cohesion and class consciousness. Workers are divided (migrants and ethnic divides are only the most dramatic examples), disempowered and disheartened. They do not have their own cultural and political autonomy. Historical organisations of the labour movement live mostly from their residual strength; they are increasingly insufficiently rooted and are split - caught in a vice between

cooptation and institutionalisation and political irrelevance and cultural witness. The population is aging. It has a strong feeling of insecurity. It is frightened. It is developing conservative feelings and instincts. The crisis of globalisation can produce regressive, reactionary and authoritarian responses.

What subjects: What is needed is a new labour movement that would be capable of uniting labour understood as an ensemble of the "productive forces", that would be able to tie together dependent work, with its needs for security, and the entrepreneurial, creative and cognitive passions characteristic of an important part of the new generations. The immigrants - the most exploited component of the work force and often an instrument of blackmail directed at other workers - could constitute a vital and dynamic component of this movement if they could find a way out of their condition of blackmail and repression and could manage to organise themselves, generating productive conflict and developing alliances. A new workers movement could establish unity against the dominion of finance capital (the accumulated debt, cartels and monopoly incomes: death eating the living) in the name of a new cooperative mode of producing and conceiving of wealth.

The feminine universe is a wellspring that is still rich in transformative energies. Women's self-affirmation has been curbed and they are very exposed (along with the gay universe) to the return of violent and reactionary cultures. The "feminisation" of work and of politics is proceeding in a dialectic of oppression, conflict and profound transformations.

The young are exposed to forms of precarity and exploitation. They have a sense of emptiness. In Italy they are subject to an inefficient and corrupt gerontocracy.

In Italy there is the spread of a diffuse feeling of rebellion toward the political class and the corruption of the ruling classes. It may be seen as a vast potential for a democratic movement (even if it does not necessarily lead in that direction). In Italy there is also a strong anti-war culture.

Negative lessons from the experience of Rifondazione: The political system is a dangerous trap. One has to understand how to play an "outsider" role: act within but maintain roots outside. We need realistic analyses, limited but clear objectives, concrete results and coherent behaviour. We need a new way of acting and making political decisions that break with the self-referentiality of the political stratum.

One cannot simply use - superficially and in a dependent way - the mass-mediatisation of political discourse. If one goes into government, one needs to be able to produce movements and changes that consolidate and reinforce these movements. Otherwise, one becomes into the crisis of the political realm and becomes a part of it.

Question 2

After the defeat of the 1970s, the left split during the next period of capitalist development into opportunistic and subaltern [subordinate] tendencies, on the one hand, and forms of minoritarian resistance, on the other. In both cases the left lost strength, autonomy, vitality, propulsive momentum and rootedness. The division within the left has roots in the hegemonic and propulsive integration of broad social sectors (the talk then was of the "two-thirds society") that the new capitalism of the 1980s and 90s was able to realise.

Today that capitalist cycle is exhausted. We aren't in a stabilisation phase. The dialectic will be more between reinforcement of the authoritarian tendencies (of a new type) and the emergence of conflicts and new social movements. In its present forms, neither the "revolutionary" nor the "reformist" left have much to offer. And there is the real risk that their division will become deeper, and with dramatic consequences.

The centre of gravity of political action should be established within the framework of a theoretical-political renewal and within the construction of a new transformative subjectivity. The question of a renewed critique of the capitalist mode of production (in its present forms) and of an autonomous, class political project that aims at overcoming it is actual and urgent.

A new revolutionary project has to be able to articulate a new critique of the limits of the capitalist mode of production that takes on fundamental notions and institutions: the concept of wealth, of productivity, of cooperation, of work; the forms of the production of money; the networks and the economy of knowledge, digital technologies, the new media of information and communication; the forms of property, particularly stressing research around the notion of the common good; forms of democracy and of politics. Probably the very notion of the market needs to be critically revisited and decoupled from the notion of capitalism.

It is because of the exhaustion (and degeneration) of the left and of 20th-century-type politics that the movements today have a decisive function in the generation of a new project and a new political subject

capable of transforming society. This does not mean to be "movementist" and to not pose the problem - in new forms - of political organisation. Neither can it mean not continuously posing the problem of action and of alliances within the political system, instead isolating oneself in the purely social, non-political realm. We need a complex subject and political project, which are able to conceive and organise a "multiple" (multilevel, multiform) transitional trajectory.

Question 3

A necessary premise is that today national politics have limited possibilities and need always to be conceived as actions and processes undertaken to build movements and politics within a broader framework; for us in Europe this primarily means the European framework. Programmatic areas in which it is possible to challenge capitalist hegemony - understood as an efficiency model in the development of the productive forces - are:

1) The governing of money and credit. The appropriation of this social power and institution on the part of markets and private financial institutions and systems has proven dramatically inefficient and destructive, not to mention distorting on the social level; and it has robbed society of the possibility of possessing a fundamental instrument to govern itself. The restoration of a progressive governance of it is an indispensable tool for reorienting development to socially and ecologically sustainable forms.

2) The governance and development of large monopolistic or quasi-monopolistic infrastructures where concentrations of power and parasitical incomes have been created at the expense of the whole society. More generally, the entire rhetoric of the market would have to be subjected to a demystifying critique and the whole economic system should be subjected to a screening that brings to the light of day the pervasive presence of oligopolies and cartels and their perverse interweaving with the power of states, in order that, in the interests of the collectivity, there can be a reversal of the relative subjugation which now exists of states to the financial oligarchies which control these oligopolistic groups / sectors.

3) The introduction of new forms of labour regulation (introducing new strictness: minimum wages, reduced working hours, minimum social income, democratic rights in the workplace and in work relations, defence of the purchasing power) to deal with the asymmetry of power between workers and capital, stopping the redistribution of income to

the benefit of capital and the long process of impoverishment of labour, sustaining domestic demand, incentivising innovation by raising the level of competition among enterprises (which is otherwise based mainly on a spiralling reduction of the cost of labour).

4) The more general introduction of new forms of regulation of the process of globalisation of finance, of commerce and of production, introducing differentiated but convergent criteria, constraints and standards (ecological, wage, fiscal, ethical), that would orient an international division of labour and the development of the productive forces in socially, politically and ecologically responsible forms.

5) The re-proposing of a political and social governance of development, which in any case would not be conceived as a simple re-proposition of the traditional notion of state control and would be accompanied by experimentation of new forms of democratic and distributive governance of the public sphere and of the relations of work themselves in the private sector. The development of new forms of political and social governance of the productive process could depress capitalist "animal spirits" but can also free up new labour and entrepreneurial energies. In any case, it is particularly important to valorise the importance of cooperation in terms of the growth of the productive forces and of productivity (in contrast to the ideology of competition, which conceals the fundamental importance of cooperation in the overall labour process). The potential offered by the nets and by the new digital technologies of information communication opens up a new field of research in this regard (which also includes the danger of pervasive social control).

Question 4

I already said I believe that the revival and the intensification of international exchanges and relations between movements and critical forces in recent years has been a vehicle of renewal and strengthening of critical thinking. Sharing experiences, ideas and experiments is a precious instrument for developing an understanding of the problems of our society as well as possible new strategies for responding to the political and cultural crisis of the left.

Europe and the USA have important differences in their political and cultural backgrounds, but they also have important similarities in their international position, their social structures, in their economic forms; they have global responsibilities and are increasingly more interconnected on the political, economic and cultural level. The current crisis will further push our societies toward a common destiny. And

there is a very serious delay in the creation of forms of communication and cooperation between critical forces active on both sides of the Atlantic.

This initiative is all the more opportune and deserves to be worked on energetically. I believe it should be enlarged to include other forces interested in a new and strategic discussion around a post-capitalist political project. In my experience, the form of periodic seminars with a limited number of participants is productive. Obviously we would always need to include new participants and make the contents of the discussions public, through audio recordings and online publications of the audio files and of their transcriptions.

I think that one could / should also add two other paths: One is that of working to interweave the two experiences of the European Social Forum and of the USA Social Forum and contribute - together with many other forces - to the creation of a regular and enlarged space of encounter, knowledge, discussion, which would facilitate the creation of relationships and cooperation between diverse forces on both sides of the Atlantic. (At "Transform!" we are now planning to organise a first instance of discussion between the USA SF and the ESF in the next WSF in Belem). The other is that of promoting more specific research projects and common work. Some concrete examples of projects on which we at "Transform!" are working and in which we are trying to involve people and forces in the USA are: "networked politics", "financial crisis and reform of the international monetary system", and the "labour and globalisation" network.

Robert Brenner

US Left: Strengths, Weaknesses, and Opportunities

The extreme weakness of the US left is a more or less straightforward expression of the organizational and political weakness of the US working class, and specifically its organized sector, the trade unions. Any strategy for the revival of the left must sooner rather than later confront the question of how to revive working class organizing and how to re-connect with the latter.

Union density in the US peaked in 1953, and steadily declined thereafter, including during the period of mass radicalization of the 1960s. By contrast, in much of Europe, union density rose into the 1980s and even 1990s. This difference—which itself of course needs to be explained—is probably the main factor in enabling the fairly impressive, continuing growth of the welfare state, as well as the *relatively* slow pace of neo-liberalization, in continental western Europe; by contrast with the US (and UK), where the welfare state has stagnated from 1980 and neoliberalism became ever more dominant. This difference is manifested in many divergent outcomes—eg. levels of poverty, levels of health, degree of elite confidence and success in pushing de-regulation, ever freer markets, and so on.

The situation of the left today vis a vis the US working class is the result, of course, of a long history, often discussed. But, its immediate sources are to be found in the failure of most of the new left of the 1960s to take advantage of the significant, if limited, opportunities to connect with working class resistance which opened up for a relatively short period in that era. There were obviously major restrictions on what could have been accomplished, in view of the objective conditions: to see this, one has only to note how limited was the success of the extra-parliamentary left across western Europe in establishing more than the most temporary roots among militant organized workers in motion, even where the prospects were most propitious—see, eg., Italy or the UK. But the problem was that only the most restricted sections of the US new left even saw connecting with the working class as the priority, let alone oriented itself in this direction. If the outcome is to be better this time, what left exists today must be – politically and organizationally – far better and differently prepared.

From the late 60s/early 70s, some heterodox Trotskyist groups, especially the US International Socialists, tried to get jobs in industry and to build rank and file oppositions to the trade union bureaucracies. Much larger, though still small, numbers, among the various Maoist groups sought in different ways to take up where the US CP left off: ,i.e. to try to build left tendencies inside the

unions, ally with left officials, and take office themselves. The heterodox Trotskyists may have had more — if limited — success in catalyzing struggles simultaneously against the entrenched officialdom and the employers, but made little headway in actually radicalizing workers politically. The most important of their initiatives led to the formation of Teamsters for a Democratic Union, which played an indispensable part in the electoral victory of the insurgent Ron Carey as president of the Teamsters in the 1990s and in the successful strike against the giant United Parcel Service in the period following. The different Maoist tendencies had more success in penetrating the union hierarchies and winning their unions to formally better political positions, but had very restricted impact in the struggle against the employers or in recruiting workers.

The political legacy in this fundamental respect of the whole period 1970-2000 is minimal. Still, there remain non-negligible numbers of ex and aging new leftists scattered throughout the unions in various official positions. Perhaps most important, there is a national rank and file newspaper *Labor Notes*, which provides ongoing analysis, orientation, and,, a pole of attraction and venue for getting together of existing activists in its annual conferences. A key task of any re-emerging US left is to make a balance sheet of the experience of the left inside and vis a vis the labor movement over the past three or four decades, in the process of thinking about how things might be different this time. Equally fundamental would be to register in a systematic way the massive transformations in the character of the working class that have taken place over the period and to begin to think more systematically and comprehensively about the implications of these transformations for organizing and politics. This could not be more important, in my opinion, because this time the famous objective conditions are likely to be more favorable, while the political organization and political preparedness of what left exists is, obviously, far weaker.

What about the opportunities?

My own view is that the deepening crisis will be very severe and go on longer than is widely expected by the economic policymaking authorities and academic economists, and will harshly affect the lives of the mass of the population to a degree not previous closely approximated in the postwar epoch. This means that it will be impossible for anyone to go on politically as before. At least in the US, the political elites, in my opinion, are unprepared for what is befalling them. They will have difficulty countering the imminent rapid decline in mass living standards—employment, housing, consumption, etc. The ideas upon which they have relied — some version or another of neoliberalism/free markets/TINA — will lose whatever traction they had. Indeed, they already are rejected by wide swathes of the working class. Another way of putting this, is that Obamism-Clintonism may come to seem hollow more quickly than might appear today in the wake of Obama's historic triumph.

At the same time, the US right, long on the offensive and increasing its influence, is in disarray. It does not seem, moreover, at least in the foreseeable future, that the right's standard statist-nationalist-militarist option, which in many places seemed so natural and viable during the last great crisis, of the interwar period, is likely to be so attractive this time, especially in the US... although perhaps, under certain conditions, the "war on terror" could successfully be brought back to life and prove especially attractive in the south and parts of the west and in what relatively little is left of small town America. Still, by and large, the atomization, privatization, and consumerization of much of the US population has had at least this one positive outcome: Americans by and large have little stomach for fighting wars, or even thinking about fighting wars. The imagined community of the nation is alive and well in popular thinking, but what its practical implications are in term of action is, I think, an open question. More generally, we may have at least more breathing room than we've been accustomed to with respect to the standard rightwing ideological conglomeration of nationalism/racism/pro-family/ anti-immigration/anti-welfare/anti-crime that has for so long carried the day.

The implication of the above is that the US left actually does have a significant political opening. The basic question is whether any sort of even minimal left politico-organizational alternative can conceivably be quickly pulled together to take advantage of this opening, given how little organized is anything that can be called the left today. One version of this question is whether or perhaps how many of the existing political groups to the left of the Democratic Party — and they are not only small in number and small in membership but usually mutually hostile — could work together in a common "intermediate organization," which had the minimal basic program of organizing mass direct action on the looming problems — unemployment/unemployment benefits, foreclosures, evictions, health care, and so forth, as well as US military interventions. In my view, attempting to see if a viable, even if small, such organization could possibly be put together in the immediate period is a top priority. For if it could, I think it could attract significant numbers of people as time goes on.

Relating to the "Center-Left" in the US

The meaning of this question is of course radically different in the US than almost anywhere else, and especially a place like, say, Germany, where the Left Party obviously has to confront on a day to day basis the classical question of how to relate to mainstream Social Democracy. In the US the issue is the Democratic Party. In my opinion, no left organization that has a hope of achieving the fundamental task of organizing mass movements/militant mass action on a variety of fronts can work inside the Democratic Party. The Democratic Party is not only dominated by various representatives of business,

but is the home of the official leaderships of the trade unions and of what remain of official Black, Latino, and women's organization. Not only the former, but also the latter can be expected to be hostile to organizing mass movements/mass direct actions — from strikes to rent strikes to sitdowns against foreclosures — which would have to be the main task of any emergent left organization, along of course with radical-socialist political education for its own membership and its various external constituencies. In my opinion, US history from the 1930s onwards demonstrates this in multiple ways. Of course, it's necessary, in many, perhaps most, cases, to acknowledge that it's better for working people, oppressed groups, etc. for Democrats to prevail electorally... and that sometimes this is extremely important, as eg. it was in 2008. Also, if there actually existed some sort of viable left formation that made organizing mass movements/mass action in multiple arenas its top priority, it might find it strategically or tactically desirable to participate in the electoral struggle... in which case, due to the first-past-the post electoral system, it would have to field candidates in its own name in the Democratic primaries. But these are, I think, very different things from participating in the DP organization, let alone with the goal of transforming it.

New Program?

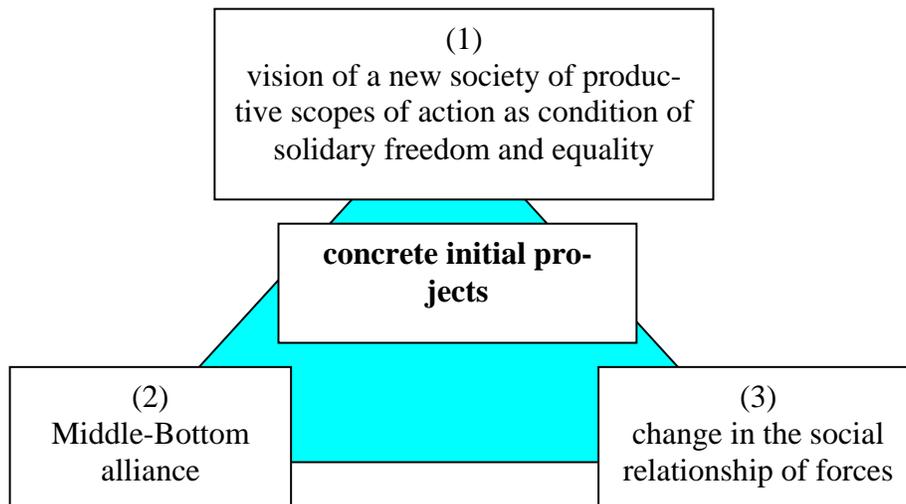
At least in the US the issue of programme — figuring out structural or transitional demands — is, in my view, today of secondary importance. Nor has it in recent decades had much to do with the success or failure of the left to win people to its ideas. For example, it has long been generally acknowledged on the left that it would broaden the appeal of the anti-war movement to have a domestic programmatic component—calling for the reduction of military spending and using that money for social needs. But, though the anti-war movement has in fact increasingly adopted this sort of demand and made it ever more prominent, it doesn't seem to have made much of a difference in practice. This is because the problem of winning people to left ideas or getting them into action is rarely that of convincing them of the rightness of those ideas or the importance of a given demand — like universal health care in the US. It is rather, somehow overcoming their cynicism, convincing them that it is possible to win. Paradoxically, of course, this has classically been accomplished — especially within the context of working class struggle within the industrial context as a result of their taking action/getting organized... and willy-nilly amassing sufficient power to suddenly make relevant left ideas/goals that had previously seemed entirely impractical. In any case, at least in the US, what the left faces today is the primordial task of facilitating the revival of popular struggles in working people's self-evident immediate interests, at the workplace and beyond... so it's not easy to see how programme per se will play a big role.

Michael Brie

Question 1

I will restrict myself to Germany in the European context. "A class formation is 'historically progressive'", according to Wolfgang Fritz Haug in the Historisch-kritisches Wörterbuch des Marxismus in reference to Antonio Gramsci, "due to its historical 'productiveness', i.e. the expansiveness of a concrete political-economic regime which it carries, thanks to which it 'drives forward the total society, since it not only satisfies existential requirements but broadens its leadership forces through a continuous occupation of new industrial-productive areas of activity' and so nourishes the credible expectation of individual 'life perspectives' "² The struggle for the active delegitimation of neoliberalism, the demonstration of its internal contradictions, the non-delivery of its promises, their distortion into economic, social, cultural, ecological and political catastrophes will only become a real claim to an independent emancipatory counter-hegemony, which is more than a "No!" and also more than the contrary of neoliberalism, if it takes on material force in emancipatory, solidarity-based initial (or entry) projects for "another world".

Graph 1: The strategic triangle of left politics



² HCDM, Vol. 6/I, p. 14 f.

The project of a emancipative transformation bound to solidarity can only be realised as a Middle-Bottom project. It requires an alliance of interests, a social contract between those groups, which form the productive core strata (the "general production worker") and those, which are marginalised by neoliberalism. In such an alliance, the new (and old) middle strata can obtain a higher degree of social security, a more stable social environment and more social integration, more qualitatively high-value services, more human dignity, more domestic demand for products and services. The lower strata would receive a dignified basic insurance, access to the "freedom goods" of a society, opportunities for a far-reaching participation of equal value in social life. All of this must come together in a project of a new higher social productivity. However, the middle strata are still caught in the illusion that the opportunities offered by the neoliberal project are greater than the risks, or they see no alternative at all and subordinate themselves.

Such a Middle-Bottom project requires a broad political and cultural alliance of social movements, left parties and organisations as well as forces in the state apparatus, of the economy, culture, the media etc. that is superior to that of neoliberalism. In Gramsci's terms: an historical bloc, "the creation of aggregate capacity of action with society-wide reach."³ However, the trade unions are still caught in a defensive battle (first signs of different approaches are emerging), social democracy sees its chances in moderate neoliberalism, social movements are to a great extent middle-class movements, the marginalised are politically and culturally still isolated. The core of a solidarity-based emancipatory transformation consists of entry projects that give the above-mentioned Middle-Bottom alliance and the vision of a new productivity a concrete content and can become the common organising point of reference of a new historical bloc, with whose help we can struggle for a change of the social relations of forces. *The left in Germany was never able in the last hundred years to develop a project that came close to meeting the above mentioned criteria. Perhaps (though I'm not a specialist in this area) in the 1980s the project of a social-ecological turn emerged which in combination with a new trade-union strategy tried to come close to this kind of transformational project, but it failed. Within this kind of situation, the left has sometimes been capable of effective defensive actions but was almost never able to launch a long-term offensive. This is still the case. The current crisis can be used for a new attempt to overcome this heritage.*

³ Ibidem., p. 23.

Question 2

Table 1: The strategic options of the Left Party

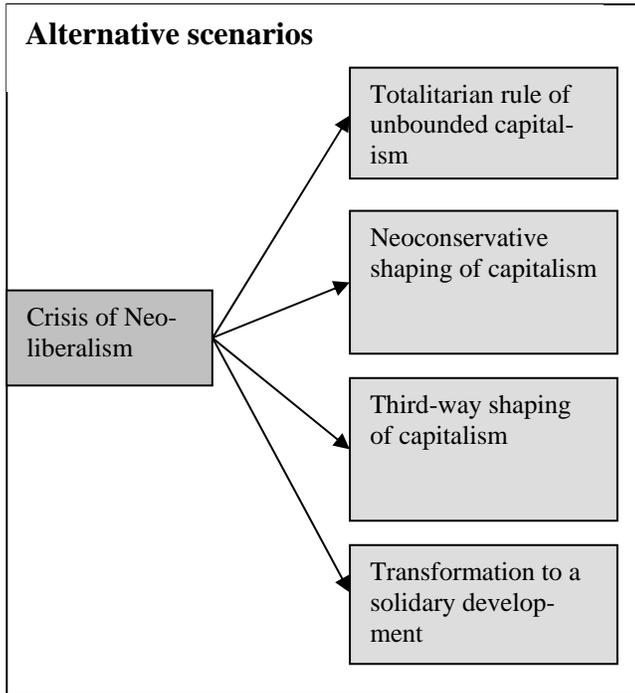
	Change of direction and transformation	System alternative	Left-wing party in a centre-left government
Assumptions about the strategic environment			
Direction of development	A change of course is socially productive	Sole alternative to the crisis: system changeover	No alternative to a watered down Agenda 2010
Fundamental conflict within society	Possibility of a large-scale conflict with 'neo-liberal forces'	Dominance of the difference between capitalism and anti-capitalism	Dominance of the difference between CDU and SPD
Social alliances	Solidarity-based democratic majorities are possible	Camp of the anti-capitalist forces	No possibility for a separate camp
Social mobilisation	Extra-parliamentary mobilisation and parliamentary opposition reinforce each other	Power is in the streets	No strong extra-parliamentary mobilisation
Perception of crisis	Organic crisis of neo-liberalism is likely	Crisis of the system possible	No intensifying crisis
Alternative strategic goals			
Direct goal	Strengthening of the Left Party both inside and outside the parliaments	Anti-systemic orientation of the Left Party	Minimum projects for government participation in 2009
Indirect goal	Creation of societal and political majorities for a change of direction	Development of an anti-capitalist leftist movement	The Left Party as a force to limit anti-social policies
Political style	Parliamentary/extra-parliamentary, confrontational/cooperative	Parliament as a stage, confrontational	Parliamentary-executive: consensual

Most important means	Left-wing state governments, broad social alliances, development of a separate public discourse	Mobilisation of the public, strengthening of extra-parliamentary struggle	Participation in state governments, parliamentary power
Coalition options	On state level (also under leadership of the Left Party), eventually left-wing government	None	Normalisation within five-party system, centre-left government with SPD and Greens
Balancing opportunities and risks			
Opportunities to heighten profile	Formulation of a directional alternative	Clear ideological identity, isolation	Function as a left-wing corrective agent
Dangers facing the organisation	Challenging and long-term; danger of party-political isolation; high insecurity	Transformation into an ideological cult	Dependence and submission towards SPD, potentially superfluous
Existing inner resources	Linking parliamentary and trade union activists, also from movements	Highly ideological groups in party (but minority)	Strong pragmatic parliamentary wing
External resources	Counts on citizens, trade unions, SPD and Greens discovering new opportunities here	Small groups on the outside	Expands the options of the SPD and Greens
Resource deficits	'Historic bloc' must first be created	Opportunities for a large ideological party very remote	Weak social anchoring, no independent function beyond that of serving as a 'corrective'

I strongly support the option of "Change of direction and transformation".

Question 3

The broader left should work strongly to build a strong counter-hegemonic project centred on some key project: I would propose a "Four-in-one" perspective for this (following Frigga Haug).



Four scenarios may emerge out of the deep crisis of current capitalism (see the graph).

A solidary transformation would be based on a mixed economy (combining four sectors producing four types of goods: public goods, communal goods, associative goods and individual goods) and a new type of life (combining on equal terms public engagement, employment, reproduction work and creative self-realisation). A participatory

democracy should emerge.

Question 4

The World Social Forum process is particularly important because it is a space for very different forces of the Left (trade unions, social movement, NGOs, left parties, intellectual groups etc.). The latter should work in a stricter framework to analyse, to share, to combine experiences in the formation of counter-hegemonic forces.

Alex Demirovic

Question 1

About the US left I can say nothing, as I know too little about it. The weakness of the left in Germany has various aspects:

1. The first aspect is that the left and its organisations - both the trade-union and the political left - have committed fateful errors in recent decades: authoritarian strategies which regard and deploy the subaltern as a mass to be manoeuvred by a general staff, minimal democratic participation, minimal democratisation of the functionary strata, opportunism and inconsistency, a know-it-all attitude, betrayal and corruption. The effect of anti-communism and of the GDR in this connection is ambivalent: on the one hand, this history stands for an authoritarian socialist tradition; on the other side, it is thoroughly recognised that there was a high degree of security and equality.
2. Despite wars, despite the enormous exploitation - there was a long period of peace, deep social crises were coped with, a high level of consumption and of education was created. This made possible a private-consumer orientation, participation in the advantages of this society without personal engagement, and distance from social struggles (the problem of free-riders). This is not just the problem of the left - the left failed due to its own successes. We are at present exiting from this phase. Alliances are breaking up, the middle class is being weakened. We are seeing processes of polarisation.
3. A further reason for the strength that existed up to now: The enormous dynamic of the bourgeoisie, its capacity for trasformismo, thus the partial absorption of the criticisms of capitalist society by means of compromises, the construction of alliances and societal change with the promise of doing things better (the logic of modernisation). In this regard we are also seeing changes, because neoliberalism does not rule through consensus and bargaining but through power strategies. The bourgeoisie is abandoning compromise and closing itself off from society. It is fanning the flames of social polarisation and strengthening the self-initiative of social currents to struggle for the conservation of reactionary life-forms (religious fundamentalism, radical-right standard-of-living chauvinism).
4. The potential of power, that is to say the power of parliamentary-democratic procedures which are able to promise participation and that everything will be still better in the future and problems will be

solved; the mute force of the features (unemployment, indebtedness) that neoliberalism has hammered together into a new technique of dominance through contingency; police and military power (in which I also include the police, war and violence films which demonstrate on a daily basis to the subaltern just how powerful the powerful are); the penal system with its prisons, the law and the pathologising and diffusion of addiction (alcohol, pills, psychotherapy); the disciplinary form of power in the schools, in the firms; finally the forms of the form of power that rationalises one's own self [self-governance]; the cultural, symbolic, media power that does not merely work on consciousness, but takes in all of daily life and the life time of individuals: music, television, sports, internet, subcultures.

5. Also a factor of weakness is the fragmentation of the left and social forces and the volatility of issues and commitments. We see constant shifts of organisational frameworks and of issues. The bourgeoisie's power is enormously dynamic, that is materially, spatially and temporally very mobile.

Perhaps one should not yet speak of the strengths of the left; however, the left exists as a relevant factor within the existing power relations: the social movements since the 1980s whose mobilisations have always run a cyclic course are present and lastingly active in many organisations. Among them I count the global-justice movement and its many networks and organisations, its national and international meetings. I would also count the cross-borders communication and development of theory - strongly dominated by some countries, above all the English-speaking ones, especially the USA, but nevertheless international in their tendency. In Germany, we have witnessed in recent years a linking of protagonists of the social movements, the trade-unions and of Die LINKE. This is a new phenomenon. There had been close ties between the Greens and the social movements. However, as a parliamentary force the Greens kept their distance from the social movements and blocked them; with the trade-unions the Greens, due to their critical attitude toward industrialisation and growth, hardly had any internal relationship. Die LINKE resulted from a special constellation that arose after the unification of the two German states: the tradition of the PDS that had stabilised itself, the social-movement activists, radical-left tendencies, and finally social-democrats and trade-unionists who could no longer accept how the SPD had been evolving and split off. If I understand this correctly, this was the first split from the dominant bloc, which had existed for nearly 60 years, coming from below: from the self-organisation of the working class. This split is consolidating itself as an independent new force. However, up to now

the totality of the left camp within German society has not grown. We need to keep an eye on what consequences the parliamentarisation of the left by means of Die LINKE will have.

Question 2

In the various countries, the constellations are very diverse. For Germany I would describe it in this way: the SPD officially stresses distance from the left in general and from Die LINKE in particular; informally the situation often looks different. Above all, the SPD wants to repair its damaged relationship to the unions and remain as the only representative of trade-union interests within the political sphere. However, its top leaders are sticking to a Third-Way politics, although this social middle is still further weakened by the recession that is currently insinuating itself, and parts of the working classes are experiencing an unambiguous worsening of their conditions of life (lower wages, longer working times, greater portion of their own social security for which they are made responsible, worsening of the possibilities for education and upward mobility, shrinking of consumption, increasing insecurity). In parts of the SPD, especially in the youth organisations of the Jungsozialisten, a clear shift can be observed from social democracy to democratic socialism. We are seeing an opening for social movements and - probably - also for a common politics with Die LINKE.

The left camp as a whole is not increasing, yet Die LINKE, as a parliamentary party, has had noteworthy electoral successes. This praxis has not yet been the object of appropriate critical reflection. Whether Die LINKE is in a position convincingly to develop itself into an alternative to the bourgeois social formation, or will only pursue classical social-democratic goals of constructing a social state, of anti-cyclical demand-side policies and of the advancement of social justice, is still not clear. In the extra-parliamentary arena, there is much criticism of Die LINKE's reform policies. However, these criticisms have up to now been very reserved, because many in the left hope that with Die LINKE a critical force can finally once again be brought to bear in the official political arena and can develop alternative perspectives. Die LINKE has in fact had this positive effect - it is once again possible to speak of socialism and alternatives to capitalism. The disadvantage at present is certainly that Die LINKE, with its successes, will - quite similarly to the Greens - draw many committed people from the social movements and tie them to the party. With this, a parliamentary and party-oriented

politics will be strengthened, while movements politics, and thus also critical perspectives, will be relatively weakened.

Question 2 brings up exactly the problem that the left has been grappling with since the 1970s. There is the strategic fundamental problem of combining reform-oriented and radical politics, which partly overlaps with the strategic problem of parliamentary and extra-parliamentary politics, but is not identical to it. My own thinking on this follows Rosa Luxemburg's concept, which speaks of "revolutionary realpolitik". I prefer to speak, less paradoxically, of "socialist transformational politics". This kind of politics would aim at defending and realising the civilisational level of democratically constituted societies - thus free elections and comprehensive public freedom of opinion as well as corresponding social infrastructures that make the political participation of citizens possible, organisational freedom for trade-unions, freedom for science and a broad anchoring of the Enlightenment in society (this means no respect for any variety of obscurantism: religion or spiritualism), abolition of all practices of intimidation and retribution. A strengthening and reproduction of democratic culture is needed. In a society like Germany's there is only a 60-year experience with democracy, democracy in the representative sense which nevertheless guarantees a certain degree of participation and freedom. As in other OECD states, we see also in Germany the crisis-ridden and cyclic character of democratic participation - yet for this pattern we do not have good concepts such as exist for the economic arena. Democratic paradigms are not present in significant parts of the German population - especially among the rulers themselves. This also goes for the USA (racist, religious-fundamentalist, anti-Enlightenment tendencies are manifestly present).

A left strategy has also to concern itself with the smallest of reforms. It's a matter of concrete improvements. We cannot speculate or bet on hitting bottom, on immiseration; all too often the ultra-realistic analysis of the left appears as if we derived some satisfaction from the idea that everything is turning out badly. Reform and revolution are not two phases: both political elements can also occur simultaneously; there is no real division of labour between them, and what will probably be decisive is whether or not the various left tendencies let themselves be played out against each other. Reforms are in themselves legitimate because they improve people's concrete lives - accordingly they should not be pursued from an instrumental point of view which in the process weakens their credibility. However, beyond this, reforms can also have a long-term strategic meaning, for political work that has been constructed in a long-term perspective creates trust. Seeing as the left

in recent decades has done much to make people sceptical of it, it will take a while before a positive future-directed perspective once again attaches to a left, socialist project. Reforms should be determined by the knowledge that they can be cancelled. In parliamentary-representative societies there is no final political victory; those who have access to resources will create new majorities to undo former successes. In addition, there are always crises. However, through protests and movements one can also create majorities; and in crises - even in crises induced by movements - opportunities for left positions to gain acceptance grow. It seems especially important to me to prepare people for the idea that reforms are threatened if social conditions do not fundamentally change. Ruptures do not simply occur overnight but are prepared in emancipatory practices - which are sometimes reformistic, sometimes radical. But then they also lead to a dynamic of change, indeed of a fundamental sort, since they transform power relations and the logic of reproduction. No one can anticipate whether such turning points will occur or will be reabsorbed. The only thing which it is possible to know is that there will be struggles, and: there will be attempts on the part of the rulers to absorb the innovative impulses into the logic of trasformismo or even to launch a passive revolution themselves, which blocks the initiatives from below. Formulating this strategic knowledge, and using it actively in dealing with the changes, is more than the left has historically done.

It is also necessary to get ready for a long period of transformation - because it takes a while before the economic quasi-natural laws of the relations of capital, the potentials of representative democracy, of institutionalised bourgeois democracy can be, as it were, exhausted. Attempts to speed up the process through violence favour authoritarian solutions within the left and do not ensure sustainable transformations of deeply rooted relations of domination. The many reforms impart to the protagonists the capacities to take over the the businesses of firms, to take over their administration in a democratic way after such ruptures. After the experience that we in Germany have had with the SPD and the Greens, it would make sense to create within the left critical-monitoring entities which keep an eye on whether political work is going in the right strategic direction. My thinking is, in effect, that there has to be a kind of competence [capacity] academy of the left (an extension of the current Municipal Academy of the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation), which would critical deal with the reality of the elected officials, convey to them an expertise of non-conformism and critique of parliamentarism and would organise discussion processes in all societal sectors regarding democratisation. The signifier "revolution" is important

in order not to lose sight of the perspective of change, but revolutionary rhetoric does not solve any problem. It creates wrong pictures: barricades, storming the Winter Palace or it turns into pseudo-radicalisation and then into its opposite: over-accommodation to the relations of power. We therefore need a political theory that makes it possible better to understand the contradiction between radical transformation and improvements of everyday life not as a pure, clear contradiction (A or non-A), and to know how to deal with it in a long-term way. Marx therefore rejects the model of political revolution and, in his critique of the French Revolution, advocates social revolution - but these thoughts of Marx have historically not been taken sufficiently seriously by the left.

Question 3.

There are experiences that suggest to me the conclusion that there will not be such strategic components. There is the experience with social-democracy, which has for decades pursued politics as the left wing of the bourgeoisie. For a long time this has been denounced as betrayal. However, I think it is, in terms of social theory and for political purposes, more appropriate to take for granted that this is the meaning of social democracy. The communist left after W W II experienced a creeping erosion which was the result of a compromise. On the one side, the communist left was an anti-fascist force, at the same time it was, for its part, statist and authoritarian - this did not lead to open critique and rejection, but rather to a creeping disaffection. It was only since the 1960s with the New Left that it was fundamentally criticised. Its claim to power, its authoritarian, instrumental tendencies were decidedly repudiated. The New Left enunciated the demand to further radicalise the critique of existing conditions. This position was found for a long time also among the Greens and the social movements - which often did not see themselves as single-issue movements but confronted the logic of domination in a more systematic way: the critique of patriarchalism, industrialism, of the expertocracy took aim at forms of domination that were thousands of years old. The mistake was, in my view, that these criticisms were separated from the critique of the capitalist mode of production which absorbed all of these dimensions of domination, actualised them and reorganised them. The experiences of these three waves of emancipation conveys the impression that all these forms of critique could be absorbed and have led to accommodations. As far as I see, this question has up to now indeed occasionally been posed on the theoretical level (Althusser: The Crisis of

Marxism) but not worked out any further ; and it has up to now not been given a politically practical significance. It would require the investigation of the logic of self-revolutionising of bourgeois social formations and the role of the left in this process. However, it can certainly be confirmed that the three waves of political strategy have all in a very extensive way also disturbed, shifted and changed the modes of reproduction of the capitalist mode of production. The only element that I can see is a methodological one: the ultra-realistic sobriety of a theory that never loses sight of class antagonism and therefore can say that there will be further struggles and more cyclic movements in the relevant issue groups.

Relevant issue groups which continuously recur in the history of the capitalist mode of production normally subjected to crisis cycles are:

- Wage labour and the emancipation processes tied to it. By this I mean especially the alternative form of organisation of daily work that corresponds to peoples needs. This is a question of the organisation of the productive apparatus. This is the arena of the organisation of labour, of decisions on resources, investments, therefore questions of participation in the area of the economy and of social labour.
- Self-determination in the totality of social relations of life. The problem of democracy.
- Directly coerced labour (all forms of slave labour) and the access to bodies (sexism and racism, medicine, population control)
- The imposition of gender identity and gendered division of labour. Alternative forms of gender relations and of the relations between the older and younger generations.
- War, violence, the politics of annihilation [genocide].
- The appropriation and processing [productive consumption] of natural resources - technology, science, research.
- Education, science, meaning - that is, culture in the broader sense. The problem of privilege of intellectual work at the expense of all other: the overcoming of [the division between] manual and intellectual work.

What the left can make clear is that these problems can indeed always be dealt with and solved in the short term within the bourgeois social formation. However, we are dealing with the continuity of natural history. What's needed is to know that this continuity has to be broken, that these problems always reoccur cyclically and that we need to create a fundamentally different overall context in which these problems

can be overcome once and for all - not because then there will perhaps be no more problems, but at least there will not be these specific ones which threaten the existence of the individual, of her/his life environment and of humanity as a whole.

Still, there are a series of urgent problems to which the left in Germany can give answers:

- Sustainability: renewable energies, especially decentralised solar energy, new consumption model (food, transportation)
- Securing of investments, of the productive apparatus, of innovation
- Income and labour time
- Qualification and education
- Sustainable taxation and social-state models which protect people from unemployment or illness; the critique of social demagogery

Question 4

On this level of generality I'm not able to say anything. Somewhat more concretely and as regards the area of left theoretical discussion it would be important to raise the mutual level of the state of knowledge/research: authors, themes, texts, periodicals, publishing houses, social relations, groups. It would be good if this were to happen not only bilaterally (USA-Germany, although this is a good and important beginning, because knowledge among the left in both countries is probably very minimal); and certain regions have to be more strongly taken into account (Africa, Eastern and South Asia).

Barbara Epstein

Question 1

The socialist left in the US barely exists, at least in organized form. We have a few yearly conferences (Left Forum, Rethinking Marxism), a few journals (*The Nation*, *The Progressive*, *In These Times*, *Monthly Review*) and a few organizations (the Democratic Socialists of America, the Committees of Correspondence, the Communist Party). We have the Pacifica network of five radio stations. Left Forum regularly attracts more than a thousand people. *The Nation* has a large readership (last I knew, around 30,000). The Pacifica stations have large audience but are very fragile, largely because they are magnets for sectarian attacks. The organizations of the left are very small and almost entirely lack influence.

The progressive movements that flourished in the US in the past are on the whole very weak: this is true of the women's movement, the black movement, the environmental movement, and others. There is a strong immigrant movement, but it would be inaccurate to associate it with the left. The anti-war movement hardly exists. At its height, the anti-war movement was led by International ANSWER, a sectarian group skilled in organizing demonstrations but with no capacity to mobilize an ongoing mass movement, and United for Peace and Justice, with much more reasonable politics, but limited by its constituency, which consists overwhelmingly of staff-driven rather than membership organizations. There are national coalitions of community organizations that address local and neighborhood issues, such as housing, health care, and local environmental issues. But these organizations do not identify themselves with the left. The US Social Forum and the yearly Social Forum in Brazil have attracted activists from a wide range of organizations and projects, and provide useful spaces for networking. But the Social Forums reflect rather than address the problems of a social-movement dominated left: absence of a coherent strategy or of the intention to develop one.

In the US, academia is the one institution in which the left has a strong presence. Left academics have influenced the thinking of many students in the humanities and the softer social sciences, and many have a

broader social influence through their writing. But the academic left has little connection with politics outside the academy, and little ability to address issues of organization or of strategy. The isolation of the academic left from social movements has fostered a star system, a tendency toward theoretical dogmatism, and sectarian battles, all of which have demoralized those involved and discredited the left. But it has kept left ideas alive, updated these ideas in certain ways, and produced a substantial number of students with progressive perspectives. Both inside and outside the academy, the left, in the US, is more an arena of opinion than a coherent movement.

There is a sharp generational split in the US left. Most of the above points apply especially to those in their late fifties, sixties, and beyond, who participated in or identified closely with the movements of the sixties. There is also a younger generation of leftists, in their twenties and thirties. Marxism was the dominant ideology for members of the older generation. For whites in the young generation of activists, anarchism is the dominant perspective; young activists of color are more likely to identify with one or another version of Marxism. Many young radicals are active in local organizing projects or non-profits. There are some national organizations concerned with particular issues (Critical Resistance, for instance, on the issue of prisons), but the only multi-issue national organization is the new SDS, which has chapters on many campuses. But it is not yet clear whether SDS will be able to play anything like the leading role of its namesake. There is no national organization that addresses the range of issues that young radicals are concerned with, and with which young radicals generally identify.

The weaknesses of this situation are overwhelming: no national organizations, no strategy, no common project, and few if any paths through which young people can enter the few remaining institutions of the older left, let alone assume roles of leadership. The left has influence on culture, but very little influence on politics. One could argue that the left as a whole has abandoned politics and has adopted culture as its arena. This carries a danger of the moralism that is often attached to identity politics and that reinforces the isolation of the left. Furthermore, the question of class has, historically, been a difficult one for the left in the US. Since the 60s, especially, the left has tended to tiptoe around the question of class for fear of being associated with an outmoded version of Marxism, or being seen as universalist and insensitive to issues of diversity. Long-standing habits of renouncing efforts toward unity and approaching issues of class gingerly if at all have left us ill prepared to address the current economic/financial crisis and to attempt to revive a disappearing left. Many on the left

understand these problems, and have come to the conclusion that we need a unified left with a common project of social democratic reform. But in the absence of a national organization, or really any organizations at all, it is hard to know how to move toward this goal. The generational divide is also a major problem. The two generations of leftists constitute two separate worlds. There are few points of contact between these worlds, and there is virtually no discussion of common strategy.

I believe that the weakness of the US left has a great deal to do with the fact that the movements of the sixties remain, at least implicitly, our governing paradigm. Most radical activists of the sixties believed that revolution was possible and that it would involve either seizing the state and creating a socialist society, or ignoring the state and transforming culture and consciousness. Hardly anyone still believes that it is possible for the left to seize the state, or that it would be a good idea if it were possible. Few believe that socialist revolution is likely any time soon. Despite this a fear of compromise remains widespread on the left, along with a habit of attacking those who are seen to have stepped over the line. The question of whether or how to relate to the Democratic Party is often at the center of such debates: while it is OK to vote for a Democratic candidate, joining or forming a Democratic Party club, even an openly left wing club, is likely to be seen as opportunism (though it is not clear what the reward is).

The main strength of the US left may be that many of the dogmas that were once fervently held by various sectors now have less influence than at any time in at least my memory. Sectarianism has not disappeared and continues to have a destructive impact in some arenas (the Pacifica radio network, for instance, has been virtually crippled by sectarian attacks). A softer version of left purism, revolving around the fear of co-optation, remains widespread. But there is growing recognition that in order to be effective the left needs unity as well as diversity, and that creating alliances with those to the right of us is more important than establishing our revolutionary credentials. Many leftists have come to the conclusion that socialist revolution is not on the horizon, and that while socialism remains our long-term goal, at the moment it makes more sense to follow what might be described as an updated social democratic agenda. This would include reinstating government regulation of corporations, supporting domestic policies that would lead to a reversal of the widening gap between rich and poor and instead promote greater economic equality, and international policies involving a renunciation of unilateralism and wars of aggression, and the pursuit of a world free of nuclear weapons. Hardly anyone, on the left, has a clear idea of how the left could most effectively promote

such policies: what organizations should be built, how to navigate the twin dangers of excessive purism and excessive compromise. But it is my impression that there is more agreement on the need for a politics of this sort than there has been for decades.

Question 2

For the US, the first question is: what counts as the left/center? It would be difficult to describe the Democratic Party as a whole as left/center, but perhaps sectors of it would qualify. At times Obama's speeches have evoked a populist stance with left overtones. Perhaps the movement surrounding Obama, especially his youth support before the primaries, which had qualities of a movement that have mostly faded during his presidential campaign. Perhaps organizations such as MoveOn.org whose purpose has been to put pressure on the Democratic Party and to influence national politics. While it is difficult to locate a left/center in the US with any precision, the left is divided between those who think that some relationship to the Democratic Party is necessary and those who think that this should be avoided.

This debate has been sharpened by the failure of the third party option. Over recent decades there have been many third party efforts from the left; all have ended in failure. Many of us voted for Nader and the Greens in 2000, and came to regret our votes. Perhaps in the future the Democratic Party will split, and there will be an opening for a party of the left than can have a genuine impact. But at the moment all a third party of the left can accomplish is to take votes away from Democratic candidates, and make the election of Republicans more likely. This means that either the left, or at least some leftists, form or join left-leaning Democratic clubs or in some other way engage in Democratic Party politics, or the left stays out of electoral politics. Some argue that the left should participate in social movements that in turn exert pressure on the Democratic Party. The problem with this position is that at the moment we have few progressive social movements with the capacity to influence the Democratic Party. If we did have such movements, their ability to wield such influence would be enhanced if the left had more influence or at least more of a presence inside the Democratic Party.

The debate over whether or not the left should have anything to do with the Democratic Party is essentially a debate between those who see the main danger as co-optation, and those who are most concerned about irrelevance. I would vote with those who fear that the left could

disappear from the political map. In the eyes of most Americans, this has no doubt already happened. Capitalism has embarked upon its most serious crisis since the nineteen thirties; in the US, the left has not been part of the public discussion. Co-optation does not seem to me to be the greatest danger facing the left. Agreeing that there should be a relationship between the left and the Democratic Party does not mean that everyone should drop whatever else they may be doing and join a Democratic Party club. But it does mean abandoning the view that anyone who works with the Democratic Party in some way should no longer be considered part of the left. Some may work inside the Democratic Party. Some may work with unions or other organizations that have direct relations with the Democratic Party; some may join organizations or movements that exert pressure on the Democratic Party directly or indirectly. While a third party of the left is not a viable option, at least for the moment, I think that it would be a good idea to organize a socialist party without electoral ambitions, at least in the national arena. A socialist party (or a party of the left with some other name) could help to give our fragmented left some degree of unity. It could provide an arena for discussion of strategy, it could promote political discussion and education, and it could provide a forum within which leftists from various constituencies, involved in various movements or arenas of political, intellectual and cultural work, could make connection with each other.

Question 3

To put my argument in its starkest form, I think we should put aside the revolutionary aspirations of the late sixties and resurrect the politics of the Popular Front, in an updated form. In 1934-35, Communists in the US and elsewhere decided to put the socialist revolution on the back burner, abandon or at least lower the intensity of attacks on leftists perceived as following the wrong line, and form alliances within the left and working class, and between the working class and sectors of the middle class, to defend and extend democracy, and against fascism. The defense and extension of democracy means reviving the almost lost tradition of popular engagement in public issues, beyond the casting of a vote. It also means working toward greater economic equality, and reviving the conception of the state with a primary responsibility to the people, an obligation to maintain livable conditions, rather than a primary responsibility to the corporations. Today issues of race and gender, and of a host of other axes of discrimination, would have to be raised in a broader way than they were in the 30s. But, in the US, we

need to re-learn how to address the issue of class, and perceive its relationship to other issues. There are also crucial new issues: the environment, nuclear arms, and the vastly expanded dangers of militarism would be components of a contemporary Popular Front politics.

Others have pointed out that it has become easier to imagine the end of the human race than the end of capitalism. The degradation of the environment, expanding wars, and the social deterioration brought by unrestrained profit-seeking, ultimately threaten everyone (or, perhaps, not so ultimately). Marx argued that the working class carried the hope of humanity. It has become difficult to see the working class as the agent of socialist revolution in the way that Marx envisioned. But it remains the case that even if there are many who benefit from the exploitation of the less powerful (including both humans and animals) and of the environment, in the long run everyone loses.

My list of demands is probably not much different than anyone else's: government responsibility for health care, serious support for education, housing, and public transportation. A shift from oil to alternative forms of energy. No war except in the case of an overt attack on the US. Negotiation and compromise, not unilateral assertions of US power. A de-escalation of the nuclear arms race, with the aim of the destruction of all nuclear weapons, coordinated internationally. None of this is original, but I think what the left could bring to it would be an understanding of the connections among these issues, and a vision of the more egalitarian, peaceful, and cooperative society and world that could be created through this process.

Question 4

Those of us in the US have a great deal to learn from the European left about how to engage with the state in a productive way, and how to create lasting and viable organizations of the left. What the European left has to learn from us is less clear to me. I do think that one of the things that we lack is a strong network of international connections. More international contact, especially among leftists facing parallel problems (neoliberalism, the depoliticization of the population, the weakness of the left) would strengthen our organizing efforts, and enrich our intellectual work.

Rainer Fischbach

This is an attempt to answer the questions, based on incomplete information, particularly in regard to the American left. Its sequence only approximately parallels the sequence of questions, while following its own logic.

(ad 1.) The condition of the left varies greatly among the European countries: the left has lost the strong position it held for decades in countries like France, Spain and especially Italy, while it re-entered the stage of parliamentary politics for the first time after decades in post war Germany.

On the other hand, the European and particularly the German Left has lost its academic footing. Schools influenced by radical political and philosophical thought have almost been extinguished. The left intellectual that figured so prominently in the post war public life of France, Italy or Germany has disappeared. Apparently the North American left has done better in this respect. Left theory lives in many universities, and prominent left intellectuals are still present. Combined with the strong idealistic motivation of still influential single-issue movements (ant-war, anti-racist, environmentalist, feminist, Third World...) this looks like a significant force, but a force that is too easily consumed (and channelled into a big explosion of nationalistic feelings) by the current or next presidential campaign of whoever manages to touch its soul by dropping the right keywords. Enthusiasm seems to be a much stronger cultural resource in North America, particularly the US, exploitable of course not only by the left.

The European left seems to have stronger ties to the institutions of social and political life, the unions, the public media (which do not exist in North America) etc., and solutions to social problems featuring state intervention, public institutions etc. still meet a better reception by a wider public than in North America, where state intervention is a no-no word but occasionally practised tacitly and pragmatically by the ruling class. They do not touch the unthinkable. This is not due to a genuine strength of the left, but the result a different institutional and philosophical heritage, and it bears the risk of the left only being swallowed up by a big system-engineering effort focused on fixing the broken pipes of capital circulation.

(ad 2.-3.) The opportunity and the challenge for the left borne by the current financial crisis is to make clear that, of course, the system needs some fix or better re-plumbing if it is not to collapse (with catastrophic consequences, given the deep dependency of life on the production and circulation process of capital), but that this has to be done along lines and based on premises which contradict established market liturgy. This means to emphasize not only that the system engineered along neoliberal blueprints is inherently instable, but that the social-democratic fixes tried out in the 1930s to the 1970s are too weak to change its trajectory in an enduring way and to address effectively the issues raised by environmentalists, feminists, Third World activists... and, of course, Third World countries.

The task that lies ahead of the left is to create a programmatic dynamic that transcends social-democratic system repair as well as single issue anti- or pro-whatever politics, while preserving their primary motives. A stable, fair and environmentally safe accumulation path requires adjustments that challenge the existing property regime and profit logic. These adjustments have to address two central sub-mechanisms of accumulation: finance and technological innovation. They have to start with the insight that currency and knowledge are, like many other things, public goods and spell out its consequences for banking and central banking, social security, infrastructure, public services, and decision making about technological trajectories. This means nothing more than to conceive of a left project qualifying for a hegemonic position.

In order to advance such a program, addressing the idealistic sentiments of a wider public is necessary, but not sufficient: a class compromise has to be struck reaching from the functional elite (those that engineer and operate all the critical systems—production, transport, communication, medical aid, education—of our current societies) to the fringes of the society. It has to be centred on the issues of good work, good life, and justice and clarify that good life for the functional elite implies justice, i. e. can not go along with extreme social polarization and bad life on the fringes. A positive, motivating force driving to such a compromise might arise from the professional ideal of good work and good service if professionals realize that these ideals are essentially incompatible with profit maximization.

Suggestions for intervention and reform should start from the financial system (conditioned state guaranties targeted at stabilizing banks of systemic importance and securing transactions needed to finance production and commerce, guidelines for central banking that balance

inflation control with economic growth, ban on speculative financial products and controls/taxes and capital movements), social security (limit social polarization and take some pressure of inflowing capital out of the financial system by means of an obligatory system with guaranteed minimum pension), labour (legislation that strengthens labour's position like minimum wages, job security, insurance, conflict regulation), education (limit social polarization and develop resources for better life and productive forces fitted to human needs), environment (start building settlement patterns, infrastructure, and industry fitted to the long-term survival of human civilization), civil rights (securing civil liberties and the private sphere in the internet age means much more than putting limits on state power; it also means putting limits on profit interests). Regarding intervention in the financial system, the left should point out clearly that the plans considered or already implemented by western governments will contribute to the continuing redistribution of income from the bottom to the top while not solving the problem at hand, but rather spread the crisis from the mortgage to the bond market.

(ad 4.) the most important aid the lefts in both regions can give to each other is to debunk myths about the others countries and putting pieces of information together in order to yield a more complete picture of current world capitalism and possible moves to tame or even transform it. Future meetings should focus more on specific issues (like the financial system and its regulation, changing patterns of industrial location, organization and labours response, communication infrastructure of the future and civil liberties, ...)

Georg Fülberth

Question 1

For this question I will limit myself to Europe and especially to the Federal Republic. The strengths and weaknesses are still - despite globalisation - tied to national conditions. A common weakness can nevertheless be identified: falling level of organisation and decreasing capacity for action of many unions in view of the fact that in labour and capital markets and in the market for goods there are different speeds: labour power is the quickest, capital the slowest. The left is inevitably strongest where social-state institutions, even in corporatist form, are the least reduced. On the other hand, in these situations its extra-parliamentary mobilisation capacity is often the least developed.

A central weakness, at least of the non-trade-union left, has to do with the fact that its contact with that which used to be called the "social question" - which it should still be called - has faded away. It could therefore become prey to movements ranging from right-populist to fascist. The greater the culturalist bias of the left is, the weaker is, as a rule, its social-political competence. A bit less Gramsci quotations (the very commendable knowledge of whom can by now be assumed within the left), much more Robin Hood - in this way weaknesses could be lessened and strengths regained. Perhaps even the word "left" is discredited where the lower strata see no connection of this political label to their own perspectives and take the left to be a faction of the better off.

Since the intelligentsia can be understood as a mass stratum within class society, it makes sense to consider the place of the left intelligentsia within the broader intelligentsia. Among its weaknesses is a preponderance of academic self-referentialism. Features of the traditional intellectual predominate. In the midst of all the talk of organic intellectuals, another figure in left history has been overlooked: *the operative intellectual* (Engels, Lenin).

Question 2

The relations between the "socialist left", "centrist social democracy" and the "civil-society movements" can only be ascertained when we

define what we mean by “socialist left”. The spectrum which these three factors refer to is narrow. At least two other points of view have to be brought in:

- a. Each generation has its own specific form of youth radicalisation which to begin with is removed from the above tripartite division. Depending on the period, the way it is politicised within the left is very different. If the “autonomous” movement of the 1970s has almost completely disappeared, it has nevertheless not left behind a vacuum, but still informal, although quantitatively smaller, new so-called “networks”. Their subsumption under the concept “civil-society movements” is too unspecific.
- b. The politicisation potential of the so-called lower middle stratum is a latently contested terrain between left and right. At present, it is the yellow press and similar media that is most likely to be responsive to this. For a “socialist left” (whatever that might be) this problematic has to be central before it turns to rather secondary themes like e.g. government participation.

Question 3

The requested limitation to four to seven central points makes sense less from the point of view of presentation than it does on political grounds: In pursuing the most important goals, aspects of single-issue movements should remain. They probably also need to have diverse organisational expressions. In my view, the goals are:

- a. egalitarian reform of the social security system (old-age, health, unemployment, long-term care insurance): Drawing on all income according to the principle of progressive taxation (regardless of whether we are speaking of national, self-administered or other public-legal systems);
- b. reversal of the labour-time policies carried out in finance-market-driven capitalism: re-adoption of an orientation to reduction of labour time without wage reduction;
- c. tax reform on the basis of a fully progressive system which
- d. enables the establishment of an efficient public infrastructure ensuring equality of opportunity;
- e. establishment of a democratically managed international financial architecture;
- f. struggle against the militarisation of foreign policy and against the new imperialism.

Question 4

The extent to which international political and trade-union structures that are part of a mutual support for the left already exist in various countries or can be created must be clarified in the actually existing national organisations and should not be argued here. However, perhaps we can say what social-science intellectuals might already be able to tackle now: the establishment of a transnational empirically based research and propaganda capacity focussed on political economy. The experiences of the "Working Group on Alternative Economic Policy" in the Federal Republic and the "European Economists for an Alternative Economic Policy in Europe" could be evaluated and the possibility of a transatlantic counterpart be considered. In my opinion, in this case it would be useful to concentrate almost exclusively on the problems dealt with above under points 2 and 3.

Stephen Gill

Question 1

This is actually two questions (!) both posed in relation to present crises & circumstances. The first issue is thus how do global *relations of force* (economic, political and military) present dangers to the Lefts, as well as opportunities? A key strength of some Left forces is that they are not tainted – as are G8 political leaders – with the failures of disciplinary neo-liberalism. A second strength is evidence of a growth in left power potentials and networking that could combine into the form of a new *post-modern Prince*.

By contrast the left needs to overcome the weaknesses that stem from how disciplinary neo-liberalism has been institutionalized over the past 30 years or so. This has meant: subordination of state forms (and culture) to capital, restructuring of state obligations for social reproduction (rolling back welfare, provisions connected to the family, education and healthcare), intensified exploitation of human beings and nature, extreme inequality of income, wealth and life chances. There is also acceleration in dispossession of producers of means to subsistence – e.g. privatization of water, common lands and natural resources. The Pentagon stands as the ultimate and coercive custodian of global neo-liberalism, with its global military strategy of “full spectrum dominance”.

Let us take the *economic* relations of force first. Parallels are now being made with the Great Depression of the 1930s. However, capitalism in the North Atlantic regions is now quite different to that in the early 1930s, not simply because of Keynesian macroeconomics but also because of collective institutions of capitalist co-operation such as the G8, as well as the EU, NATO, etc. The dislocations associated with contemporary capitalist development may not necessarily have the same material and political implications as in the 1930s (e.g. financial crisis leading to mass unemployment leading to the abandonment of liberal capitalism).

⁴ In 1929 the service sector in western Europe and North America com-

⁴ In the US the poor (and many of the unemployed) have arguably been rendered increasingly invisible in America’s affluent society and politics and the prison boom that began in the 1980s has made a new contribution to the invisibility of the poor, removing them from poor communi-

prised approximately one-third of all workers, whereas today about two-thirds of all workers are in services, and half of service workers are within the public sector. In 1929 transfer incomes in Western Europe amounted to less than 4 percent of GNP, whereas in 1987, because of unemployment benefits, pensions, family and social security allowances, transfer payments amounted to 30 percent of GNP, thus stabilizing capitalist development. What can the Lefts do to attract greater support from service workers?

Indeed, with respect to the *political* level of analysis, in much of the world, liberal constitutional forms have been consolidated, and become relatively universal in the politics of the European Union and Former East Bloc. It is in this political context that European leaders have institutionalized disciplinary neo-liberalism and new constitutionalism (e.g. the Maastricht Agreements) thus separating economic policy and management from democratic political control and institutionalizing capitalist disciplines. However, after years of preaching sound money and fiscal prudence and cuts in social benefits we suddenly see G7 guarantees to support the financial markets to the tune of 5 trillion dollars or more. The left needs to reiterate that it was widely anticipated by many that financial liberalization and deregulation were paths to disaster and that G8 political leaders ignored these challenges – e.g. most recently the Trilateral Commission discussed these problems in early 2008 but the authorities did nothing to avert the financial collapse until it was too late. Moreover, the left should point out that measures as just undertaken by the G8 only occur when the capitalist market system is itself is threatened, not to deal with human or environmental security. G8 leaders – who govern on behalf of the rich – do not seem to be capable of sensing the contemporary crisis of social reproduction that is occurring, e.g. reflected in the US by waves of foreclosures and dispossession, rising unemployment, and growing inequality (e.g. Republicans under Bush and putatively McCain, who owns 12 cars and 9 houses; Palin's wardrobe; Bush's Treasury Secretary has a net worth of \$500 million).

ties and official government statistics. Adding the prison population to official unemployment statistics reveals that the jobless rate for young white men in 2000 was 10.6% without and 12% with the prison population counted, for young Hispanic men it was 10.3% without and 14.3% with the prison population, and for young black men it was 23.7 versus 32.4%. Also, 1 in 3 young black men out of work in 2000 was in prison or jail. See Western, Bruce. *Punishment and Inequality in America*. New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 2006.

The crisis of global leadership and questioning of the legitimacy of the capitalist market system opens up very large opportunities for the Left. It has a new strength: the internet and other new means of communication have broken the monopoly of the ruling classes to present their official versions of the truth. The global Lefts might also use a new slogan, maybe something along the lines of the Argentinean left's response to the failure of its leaders "*¡Que se vayan todos!*", "Everyone must go": i.e. the corrupt and inept G8 politicians who are beholden to plutocratic interests – as markets crash and the rest of us bear the consequences – e.g. weaker countries are forced to adopt austerity measures (e.g. Iceland, Hungary, Turkey) under IMF tutelage. The G8 leaders presided over the current disasters and they cannot now claim the right to fix the system!

With respect to the *strategic* or *military* relations of force, the central feature of the last two decades is how the power and influence of the United States has increased, and its empire of bases now encircles the globe, partly to sustain US control over much of the world's oil supplies (and to underpin its energy-intensive consumerist growth model). Here we understand the USA as a state-civil society complex, as a locus and model of accumulation and as a crystallization of military power and power projection capabilities. This is despite the efforts of other nations, for example China and Russia, to counterbalance some of this strategic power. One indicator of this relates to the redefinition and extension of NATO out of area – in the Balkans and in Afghanistan for example. The Lefts have little influence over military-strategic questions and this needs to change and be addressed in Left programs. A further weakness for the European Lefts is that the penetration of not only European economic and political development but also European security apparatuses by American power means that progressive initiatives within a wider process of European integration may be limited by the USA's relationship with each member state—the arrangements in question remain shrouded in secrecy and connected to the security and intelligence apparatuses – an aspect of the strategic relations of force. Indeed the left has been subjected to intense surveillance and intimidation especially since emergency powers were instituted after 9/11.

A final weakness of some of the old Left is related to its theorization of some of the changes just sketched, and its conceptualization of political agency. We need better theoretical frameworks to grasp the profound attack on the conditions of existence of a majority of the world's population. This means looking beyond the crisis of accumulation dramatized when capitalist financial markets imploded in late 2008;

more fundamentally I think we should see this as a crisis of global social reproduction – involving all of the above as well as the reckless despoliation of the biosphere, intensification of exploitation of human beings, and the spread of primitive accumulation in North and South (e.g. privatization and dispossession of livelihoods). One way to approach this is to conceptualize questions as involving not only power and production but also what feminists call social reproduction to identify key dimensions – as well as prevailing norms and governing principles – of the global political economy.⁵

Another way to put this is the Lefts need to promote a new “common sense” and challenge the hegemonic capitalist concepts – e.g. that the *credible* governments seek to generate the *confidence* of capital and ensure a favourable investment climate for the “markets”. We should redefine credibility in terms of sustainable, equitable and just policies to meet social needs. Lefts will need to engage with how such concepts and questions play out in the crises, showing that stabilization of capitalism is not enough – a deeper argument should be that capitalist states, which have helped to construct and legitimate the enormous claims on society associated with the bailouts of capital – need to be transformed. The commanding heights of the economy need to be brought under democratic control with a different type of governance by red-green parties of a new kind, collectively a post-modern Prince whose central task would be to govern and foster a new common sense (see below).

Question 2

This question is another way of saying that there is an absence of a coherent and well-organized Left International, and we need to build one. There are many radical forces not just in the northern Metropolitan countries, but also in the South who share a broadly sympathetic political perspective that might be brought together in a coherent program – e.g. via the World Social Forum, and the various national and regional social – as well as some of the political parties, movements and institutions – e.g. ATTAC and the Landless Workers’ Movement in Brazil, as well as many professionals and technical experts – that can provide a

⁵ Isabella Bakker and Stephen Gill (2003) *Power, Production and Social Reproduction: Human In/security in the Global Political Economy*. Palgrave.

template, and a series of methods of networking, reflecting key forces in a post-modern Prince

Given the scale and depth of the present global crises, the Lefts seem to have little alternative but to engage in a strategy of co-operating to transform the states and to engage those in the social movements who are willing to consider how to democratize capital and to re-channel its direction. With this opening in mind I would suggest the following methodological points to consider “realistic prospects” of such a combination:

A. Acknowledge that many of today’s progressive movements are grounded in a very broad grasp of conditions of existence in ways that go well beyond earlier forms of progressivism when primacy was given to the politics of production and struggles between labour and capital. This meant that many other fundamental issues – associated with livelihood, racism, relations between men and women, with social reproduction and relations between human beings and nature – were relegated to secondary importance.

B. We should avoid the fallacy of assuming that all forces of opposition are/should be unified in a specific response to all problems, or unified as a traditional political party.

C. Whilst this can give rise to a lack of organization, it is difficult to co-opt, intimidate or decapitate movements that are globally interlinked and organized through powerful means and modes of global communication; they use radical media to place dominant power under scrutiny; critiques can be instantaneously communicated worldwide.

D. We might therefore re-imagine political agency in terms of forces in movement – a *post-modern Prince* whose key elements are characterized by unity in diversity.

Nevertheless one obstacle that needs to be confronted directly is the reticence of many left forces to strive for control over state institutions as a part of a radical program to address the current crisis. Without control of the state, capital can never be fully controlled, nor can the education system be reformed, and indeed without the state we cannot imagine for example, the production of a global public health system which actually operates on behalf of the vast majority of the world’s population and does not simply cater to the diseases of affluence. An objection to this line of argument sometimes heard in Canada is that the state is capitalist (and capital is the state). However this does not negate the position that we need new forms of state and therefore the state is a necessary mechanism of transformation of society: to ad-

vance a strategy of social transformation the state itself must be transformed. This is an argument which the neo-liberals should have taught the left by now – their efforts have been precisely to try to change the very mechanisms and operations of the state, and the patterns of incentives the state embodies in its policies, to institutionalize their power and create a new hegemony.

Being based in North America there is a prior question: what parties or vehicles actually exist for a socialist program, in nations where there has never been anything like a developed welfare state or strong socialist parties? There is also the added question that – as Gramsci pointed out – there are many on the left who, despite their potent critiques of the capitalist system, nevertheless are fearful of ultimately challenging it, i.e. they either have an inner fear of taking power or the present situation is perhaps still congenial to them. This stance has undoubted psychoanalytic dimensions (that I do not claim to fully understand) but it results in the emasculation of the left; as Gramsci observed in the *Prison Notebooks*: “The beaver, pursued by trappers who want his testicles from which medicinal drugs can be extracted, to save his life tears off his own testicles”

Question 3

Left programs should seek broad support and focus on immediate macroeconomic measures to stabilize and remobilize the global political economy and then generate specific proposals for governing the commanding heights of the economy (when capital is mobile and potentially global) and thus new mechanisms of international co-operation.

We are witnessing how capital is demanding that the state socializes its huge debts, and nationalize bankrupt firms. The position that Lefts should take on this question, is in my view very simple and clear. We should demand full nationalization of the commanding heights, with democratic control over production, and of institutions of social reproduction, including the education system, e.g. to ensure that the curricula offered (e.g. in economics departments) include serious consideration of alternative and sustainable ways of organizing social and economic life, not an economics curriculum of problem-solving mechanisms to reproduce the capitalist system and maximize profits.

A possible objection to nationalization is that capital is no longer national, but is increasingly part of a globalized political economy, and therefore the issue of who owns capital operating in different jurisdic-

tions is a difficult and thorny one. However, the EU has already provided us with the template of a solution, when it created not only the euro but also the European Central Bank (similar arguments can be made with respect to prudential regulation of capital – e.g. work done by private capital itself in the private G30). The ECB has transnational authority in the execution of European monetary policy and aspects of regulation, in ways significant for all countries that use the euro for their transactions or hold it as a reserve currency. Nationalization would face specific and complex constitutional challenges in North America, due to NAFTA & the US constitution. Nonetheless, it is possible to imagine how to fully socialize capital.

It may be objected further that Lefts have little expertise in constructing such institutions, but it should be pointed out that the best brains that money can buy, and their institutions, built up over centuries by capital, are utterly discredited by the recent crisis. Moreover the Lefts can go beyond the narrow, selfish, myopic & economistic limits of dominant discourse and address the logic of our energy-intensive lifestyles and patterns of consumption and their global implications – e.g. for health, the biosphere and military strategy. Initiatives should link to other long-term policies, e.g. to deal with structural unemployment and ageing populations. The latter trend will go much further in the next 30-40 years, according to virtually all demographic predictions. So far fiscal crisis has been primarily related to the mobility of capital and skills; the age structure of the population will increasingly dominate fiscal and social questions. The new common sense of the Lefts should be creative – to break down false dichotomies concerning work & retirement, productive & unproductive people, and the young and the old.

Question 4

Left co-operation should be imaginative, democratic & theoretically unlimited:

- Resources should be synergized & allow joint research and shared political initiatives, e.g. to rethink governance of global finance, & issues above. Similar task forces could address cultural issues, media, military and strategic questions etc.
- Future meetings should combine serious studies with debates and networking. Potentials could be increased by linking with World Social Forum and other left organizations. A lot can be learned from how

that *de facto* Capitalist Internationals operate, e.g. the Trilateral Commission (although these are exclusive and self-selecting).

Jörg Huffschmid

1. Opportunities to strengthen the left

The financial crisis - which has not (yet?) translated into a worldwide economic crisis – offers good opportunities for the left in both regions to formulate a proposal for the *democratic transformation of finance*.- in Europe as well as in the USA. A good conception would probably be received at least with attentive interest in the public and could be of help to many leftist groups. Such an initiative would be based, on the one hand, on a general public awareness, outrage and anxiety about the future of the financial system, safety of deposits, functioning of the payment system, provision of credit. etc. On the other hand it should clarify the structural and political roots of the crisis (beyond individual greed and irresponsibility) and therefore propose changes which take serious the endlessly reiterated declarations that the stability of the financial infrastructure is a public good, and take finance under permanent public control, including permanent public ownership with full voting rights, and new business rules for banks and capital markets.

In Europe the chances for such an initiative to gain ground in the public and with social movements and actors are perhaps better than in the USA, because there are already certain political and social activities relating to financial markets.

- After the Asian crisis in the late 1990s the movement attac (*association pour la taxation de transferts internationaux à l'aide aux citoyens/s/nes*) was founded, initially focussing on the proposal to introduce a Tobin tax on currency transactions, but now with a much broader (perhaps sometimes too broad a) perspective, in which financial markets still play a central role. Attac exists in some 20 European countries, although in different strength and with sometimes serious internal difficulties. In several countries (particularly France and Germany) it has developed relatively well publicised activities.

- In Germany also trade unions have become increasingly aware of the threats of unregulated financial markets and activities of financial investors like private equity and hedge funds. This offers opportunities to include them in a left proposal for transformation the financial system..

- Amongst political parties the Linkspartei has made proposals combining immediate rescue measures with more comprehensive perspectives for the financial sector, and also in the social democratic party the voices are gaining ground who would go further than immediate repair actions.

2. "Revolutionary Realpolitik"

The present political and social developments facilitate the set-up of abroad alliance of left forces (including the reformist left) and at the same time offers the opportunity to push forward transformative proposals beyond mere repair. It makes no sense and will not be successful to regard such alliances merely as "tactical alliances". Such a view supposes that the socialist left has a clear conception about what to do and how to organise finance in an alternative development model. This is – at least in my perception – not the case. The case for nationalisation of the leading banks for instance seems quite clear-cut and should in my view be very strongly supported. But then in Germany state-owned banks were the most speculative and hazardous actors on the scene, and furthermore, state-owned banks as the main supporting basis for imperialist expansion are not really what we have in mind. Therefore it is quite reasonable to enter a "serious alliance" to discuss the future of finance and develop leftist proposals. Whether in the end such alliances will survive or whether they will be paralysed and split up between different fractions we do as yet not know – and we should not pretend to know. and act as if we knew.

3. Programmatic components of a left strategy

For instance a programmatic conception for the democratic transformation of finance should contain different elements which are reformist and transformative to different degrees:

- More reformist (although difficult to achieve): the immediate prohibition of the most destabilising and destructive practices in the financial sector (securitisation, high leveraged loans, offshore centres, hedge funds et al.).

- Ambiguous: the nationalisation of leading banks to secure the basic functions of the system. On the one hand it is seen (and implemented) as a temporary measure to save the system which will eventually be restored in its old structure. On the other hand it can be a transformative measure when it is regarded as a permanent change of financial structures and central element of a regime change

- Ambiguous: the reform of the mission and business rules for the banking sector and capital markets. (banks should concentrate on deposits and loans, securities markets should be decelerated, etc.)

- More transformative: addressing and removing the underlying causes of the dominance of financial markets (accumulation of financial assets as a consequence of upwards redistribution of income and wealth, and of the privatisation of social security) Re-distribution of income and re-socialisation of social services and health care.

Similar reformist-transformative conceptions could be formulated for other areas:

- The defence, strengthening and democratic restructuring of the public sector, particularly public services; against the strong pressures of liberalisation and privatisation from the EU.

- A regime change in macro-economic policy (monetary, fiscal, incomes policies), pertinent particularly for the EU.

Hans Jürgen Krysmanski

Question 1

The main strength of the European left is that it has, by now, a realistic grasp of what socialism is not and what it can be. The road to Socialism cannot be the dictatorship of one party claiming to be the avantgarde of an ill-defined proletariat and necessarily falling prey to the oligarchic malady (nondemocratic decision processes, petrification of leadership etc.). On the other hand we have learned that the socialist project – by all means – has to maintain and develop two components: a) an absolute and 'scientific' management of the productive forces of society (K.H.Tjaden) and b) an absolute and philosophical adherence to the ideal of peace and peaceful solutions to all social, economic and political problems. The main weakness of the European left is its meekness after the fall of state socialism. This is currently being corrected by the crisis of finance capitalism (which, obviously, will lead to a much more autocratic, dictatorial system of capitalist government and, consequently, a much more visible, definable, 'attackable' opponent of the left).

The main strengths of the American left are a) the traditions of a protest culture dating from the fifties and sixties and b) the heritage and the promises of the digital revolution of the nineties. Both traditions link the power of the individual – from pioneering life styles to 'personal computers' (California ideology) – to the variety and vastness of alternative social, political and economic movements and networks. Especially the digital revolution - utopian concepts based on interactive electronic networks, emerging real new paths of action – represents a reservoir for tools and ideas of action that so far has only been tapped on the surface (cf. the Obama campaign).

Another aspect that could enhance the effectiveness of the American left is the specific American tradition of power structure research. The fact that power structure research today is quite marginalized while 'Marxist theory' (including its feminist, August Bebelian branch) is thriving, seems to be related to one weakness of the American left: that its Marxism is overly abstract and scholastic, comprising, in a nutshell, all the theoretical and ideological altercations that have affected the left movements within the past 150 years. This obviously is due to the fact

that the American left did not experience the interplay of theory and praxis in (state) socialism as the European left has.

Question 2

After pointing to some of the strengths and weaknesses of the American and European left it seems obvious that by merging the 'strengths' of the two sides the 'contradictions' may become moving forces. By

- (self)critically handling the concept of a socialist party,
- adapting to the traditions of alternative social, political, cultural and economic movements and networks,
- stressing the 'scientification' of the productive forces and
- democratizing the electronic media,

the socialist left could certainly cause portions of centrist social democracy and of civil-society movements to become partners. And if anything, the current crisis of the capitalist finance system shows that this is a real possibility.

Projects like

- innovative party structures (cf. the early green party in Germany),
- seriously supporting certain (especially peace related) social movements,
- conceiving and offering scientific plans for ecologically sound production,
- developing the political usefulness of the internet

will generate their own 'organizational foci'. This is organization by practice, not the practice of organizational debate which seems to be what this question #2 implies. And in this context, the term 'tactical alliance' is misleading, pointing to organizational practices that might be ok on Wall Street or in Washington or, for that matter, in the Bundestag, but not within the strategy of a movement still based on the Communist Manifesto.⁶

Question 3

So: why should any strategy of the left concentrate on the contradictions *within* the left? It is much more important to concentrate on con-

⁶ "In place of the old bourgeois society, with its classes and class antagonisms, we shall have an association in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all."

traditions within the capitalist *system*, within the financial system. A left strategy could address the following:

We live, abstractly speaking, in a US-dominated phase of financial expansion, in which “an expanded mass of money capital (m’) sets itself free from the commodity form, and accumulation proceeds through financial deals (as in Marx’s abridged formula mm’).” (Giovanni Arrighi) Today, this phase of financial expansion is bolstered by ‘scientification’ and ‘informatization’. These processes have a profound effect on how power in general and monetary power in particular are exercised. This is prompted by extremely cheap computer power and the development of statistical techniques for drawing conclusions from large amounts of economic and social data, economic interests can scrutinize society, consumers etc. This has boosted the number and the qualifications of the various managerial elites tremendously, but – contrary to the expectations of Daniel Bell – no ‘rule of technocrats’ has arisen. On the contrary: the managerial and knowledge elites have turned into a new service class, functioning – in the last instance – at the bidding of the money elite. The money elite is at the core of a power elite that, for a long time, has not really been on the radar screens of the left.

The money elite embodies the liberation of huge amounts of money and their transformation into ‘pure power’. This basically is a very old phenomenon based on the fact that money simply is ‘what money does’.

In that sense the superrich, constituting a class of their own, are ‘capable of everything’. All possibilities of the knowledge and information society are at their disposal. And so, by means of a ‘monetary power complex’, a new centre of gravity of (post)modern society is coming into existence. Encircling this core structure (and its actors) are additional ‘rings’ of functional elites, especially the ‘political directorates’, implementing the workings of the ‘monetary power complex’, serving it and owing their existence to it. No doubt, there is an attempt to establish global power structures and a global ruling class. We know far too little about that.

Therefore additional programmatic components should be articulated after a period of fact finding and discussion (‘Who Rules America?’, ‘Who Rules Europe?’).⁷ What about establishing left think-tank-like structures for that purpose?

⁷ Cf. H.J. Krysmanski, Who will own the EU – the Superrich or the People of Europe? RLS Policy Paper 3/2007

Question 4

Apart from the money elite, our attention should be focused on the knowledge elites (the Silicon Valley elites), the political elites and especially on the managerial and financial elites – all of whom are forced to act globally (not regionally) and all of whom are presently in a state of turmoil, acting out the severe contradictions of the system.

The serious contradictions between potent investors (the money elite) and the managerial class are of a global nature, too, and cannot be addressed by a 'regionalized' left. An important advisor to rich Arab investors wrote (already in 2004): "The people running these gigantic global corporations are all part of a tiny club, leaving the ordinary investor hanging out to dry ... They fly on private jets paid for by shareholders and are given private booths at major games and shows ... There is a foul smell in the corporate boardrooms of the world's largest companies and a huge shareholder revolt is building up ... But what is more important here is that these practices are becoming a menace to the global economy ... It is time for the wealthy, like the Arabs who have hundred of billions of their money invested in these big companies, to ask their bankers some tough questions. Where is my money, and what are you doing with it?"⁸

On the other hand, the service classes are increasingly unsure about their loyalties, they generate whistleblowers and dropouts with a mission. Many of them are willing to listen to intelligent arguments from the Left. And, of course, even some of the superrich are open to reason. All this provides opportunities for political action and for strategies on behalf of the global multitude of people and towards an 'ownership society' of an entirely different design.⁹ Hence more travel, more communication, more cooperation not only within the various left movements, but in the real world, too, where the left again has a real chance to become a dominant element of a global intellectual culture – if, for example, the growing sales figures for 'Das Kapital' are any indicator.

⁸ Youssef M. Ibrahim, 'The Collapse of Capitalism as we know it', IHT, March 9, 2004

⁹ Cf. Rick Wolff, Capitalism hits the fan, <http://leninology.blogspot.com/2008/10/capitalism-hits-fan.html>

Peter Marcuse

My focus is on the left in the United States.

Question 1

The left in the United States does not have a mass base; it is largely (but not only) supported by better-educated better-off individuals, and probably heavily academic. It needs to 1) develop its own analysis of current issues and their roots; 2) Work out the links between that general analysis and the day-to-day issues and campaigns of oppositional groups, both grass-roots and cultural; and 3) work directly with oppositional groups in supportive roles, including direct participation in ongoing campaigns, technical assistance, and theoretical deepening of understanding. There is a receptivity to such work, but also an awkwardness and even suspicion that needs to be overcome.

There is an opposition based on 1. immediate material needs (the homeless, the displaced, the unemployed, etc.), 2. the cultural oppression or neglect (women, gays and lesbians, artists, minority group members, immigrants – in each case also often with immediate material needs; and 3. Dissatisfaction with the existing society's push towards one-dimensionality. The left needs to bring these sources of opposition together, both through theoretical work and through organization.

Question 2

We are in no position to condemn or spurn cooperation with others having parallel positions in opposition on individual issues. Decisions need to be made on a case by case basis, not with blanket acceptance or rejection of cooperation.

We will often have a different analysis of causes and additional suggestions for response, but that should not prevent agreement on consistent but differently-reasoned strategies and tactics. On issues such as gentrification, immigration reform, unemployment compensation, progressive taxation, adequate welfare, non-discrimination, we can easily make common cause.

Question 3

As above: programs on issues of gentrification, immigration reform, living wage, anti-privatization of governmental functions, public works, health care, unemployment compensation, progressive taxation, adequate welfare, non-discrimination, peace. Each has deeper roots than the separate issue automatically raises, and the left's position should expose those roots without interfering with the attempt to provide immediate relief.

The Social Forums, nationally and internationally, deserve substantial support. They are one of the few institutionalized spaces where the left can interact directly with other oppositional groups. Political parties, apart from their general absence of open organizational structure, are a poor place for such interchange, because the priority of winning an election drowns out any effort at analyses that may be unpopular with some.

Question 4

Many issues are radically different on different sides of the Atlantic. No one in the United States left needs be concerned about whether to join a governing party coalition or not; Bernie Sanders is the only prominent socialist in elective office, and is considered simply an independent. The one area where the left in the United States may have something to offer comrades in other countries is social movement activities at the local level, demands for democratic local decision-making, etc.

Two forms of direct cooperation: one focused on common national issues, as above -- gentrification, immigration reform, living wage, anti-privatization of governmental functions, public works, health care, unemployment compensation, progressive taxation, adequate welfare, non-discrimination, peace -- with interchange on analysis, experience with alternate proposals, strategies. The other focused on global issues targeting global/international institutions, on trade policies, human rights, war and peace, environmental sustainability, equalization.

Almost any form of exchange of information and experience is productive and can be inspirational, but should be formatted to include not just the already left but broadly oppositional groups.

Harold Meyerson

Question 1

American exceptionalism persists. At the moment, the most dynamic political movement in the U.S. is the altogether amazing organization of the Obama campaign. (I'm writing about one week before the election.) Obama now has more than 3 million donors, the vast majority having made small contributions online, and the estimates of the number volunteers go as high as a mind-boggling 5 million.

Obama's campaign is organized like no other. Drawing from Obama's own background as a community organizer, and under the tutelage of Marshall Ganz, the long-ago organizing director of the United Farm Workers under Cesar Chavez and more recently organizing guru at the Kennedy School, it has relied on personal and online recruitment and then having the recruits organize their own neighborhoods or online groups. At one crucial instance when Obama was moving to the center by not opposing the extension of certain Bush "national security" programs that jeopardized civil liberties, there was so much online pushback from his own supporters that Obama was obliged to both justify and soften his position in an online communiqué to his backers. Nobody fully grasps the potential for the Obama legions to become an interactive standing army in American politics. The Democrats have not really had organizations that existed between elections since the heyday of the big-city machines 80 years ago, and the heyday of unions 60 years ago. And Obama's army is more consciously ideologically liberal, in an American sense, than the rank-and-file of either of those, and much more self-initiated than either of those as well.

In short, we have a new progressive formation in the U.S., with a diverse class and racial base, though it surely is majority middle-class and white, albeit with a commitment to working-class economics and a multiracial coalition and vision. If it has forebears in American history, it is probably the Jacksonian Democrats or the pre-Civil War Republicans – that is, broad movements that took partisan political forms. The Obama coalition is broader than his organization, but it's his organization that creates the opportunity to create a new force in American politics and society. But when it comes to predicting what this force will become, all of us are flying blind.

The major organized social movement in the U.S. remains the trade unions, which view this year's election as crucial simply to their survival. If Obama is elected along with a sufficient number of new senators and congressmen (and

right now, that looks quite likely), it may well be possible to enact into law changes in the country's basic labor law that will enable unions to grow again. (A number of unions have so atrophied, qualitatively as well as quantitatively, that they will not be able to grow even with the new law, but from five to ten should grow considerably, so that the number of union members could increase by half over the next half-decade or so.) Generally, though, the union movement is more divided and weaker than it's been in decades. While the Sweeney regime at the AFL-CIO has positioned labor at the center of the American liberal community, and has embraced the causes of most every newer social movement of the left (including the peace activists, in a total reversal of the old cold war politics of the Meany-Kirkland era), the vitality of the movement continues to wane, though in individual unions, it's still to be found.

In the absence of even a minimally responsive federal government, labor has helped create semi-autonomous local advocacy groups for greater social justice in cities across America, the living-wage movement being the chief example of this. Ironically, with the coming of an Obama administration and a more Democratic congress, if such are elected, the federal government will recapture its place as the central arena for progressive struggle. These local groups will surely continue to do important work, but politically, they, too, fold into the American center left. Political conditions in America have not permitted the left to have an oppositional stance to the center left, so rightwing and powerful has the Republican alternative been. If we are on the cusp of a genuine political realignment in which the right goes into eclipse for a long period of time, that might cease to be the case. But the right has governed so long and so terribly in the U.S. that it will take quite a number of years for the left to stray electorally from the center-left fold – nor should it until that realignment is an established fact.

For now, the economic crisis of the past several months has greatly strengthened the center left in America – ultimately, it is why Obama is likely to win the White House and the Democrats are likely to win big in Congress. It has not strengthened any groups to the left of the center-left, because the United States has no such groups. With the rightward shift that accelerated when Ronald Reagan became president, the left necessarily shifted to defending the gains of the past, and after nearly three decades of playing defense, the socialist left does not exist in the U.S., and the social movement organizations work together on behalf of the Democrats and center left causes. It is, for all that, a time of ideological gains by the center left. Free trade no longer commands popular support, deregulation is widely viewed as the root cause of the current crisis, some form of national health care (already popular for years) now looks likely to pass, and the public supports major public investments in an alternative energy industry and rebuilding the American infrastructure. The conflicts an Obama administration is most likely to face in its first year will be with the

balanced-budget forces within and without the Democratic Party. Obama has made it clear, however, that this is a time for governmental activism more than for budget balance.

As to using the current financial crisis to put in place the rudiments of a global mixed economy, most American liberals haven't even contemplated the prospect yet. The one exception here is certain American unions, which have been active in establishing global works councils with unions in other countries that share a common global employer. The United Steelworkers, a stellar union whose vision is as transformative as the union itself is obscure, has merged, at least notionally, with Amicus, the largest union in the UK. Domestically, individual leftist economists and economic commentators have criticized the Bush administration's opposition to putting public members on the boards of banks in which the government has an equity stake now, and the administration's reluctance to require loans from banks that received public funds to unfreeze loaning but have yet to do so. But no organizations have made a public issue of these shortcomings. (The economists at the major unions have made these kinds of critiques, but their organizations are entirely occupied just now with electing Obama president.) So what the crisis has done in the U.S., fundamentally, is simply shift public opinion in the direction it was already trending – the center left. Obama's economic advisers include some genuine progressives (Jamie Galbraith and Jared Bernstein among them), but more common are former Clintonians who have publicly questioned their former commitments to free trade and budget balance (former Treasury Secretary and Harvard president Larry Summers heads this list).

Many of the issues raised in this question have no bearing within the U.S. There is no part of the center left that is anti-parliamentary, and there is no left to the left of the center-left. The anti-globalization movement left the streets after the attacks of 9-11, though the popular opposition to the existing global trade regime grew more once the anti-global left stood down. (Opposition to trade deals was a common theme among the Democrats who ousted Republicans in the 2006 congressional elections.) That said, I think there is an opportunity, if labor law reform passes, to strengthen the most progressive unions within American labor, which in turn will strengthen the center-left at election time. In conceiving a common project for the disparate lefts of the U.S. and Europe, I would suggest we look at ways to broaden the current discussion taking the regulation of the financial system to a more transnational or even global level. I think we should look at the crisis as an opportunity for leveling up internationally, and not just in financial regulation. How about establishing stronger global consumer protections, now that the production chains for medications and food products and toys and much else are global and in many instances dangerously unregulated? How about agitating the labor movements in Europe and the U.S. to become as global as the corporations they must com-

bat, to use global works councils and other bodies to set global limits on what employers can do? If we're moving toward a latter-day Bretton Woods, we should remember that the original Bretton Woods actually addressed global labor rights, though those commitments were not kept. The current crisis has already caused the parties of the European center-left to question and in some particulars abandon their neoliberal policies. I leave it to European movements and parties to the left of those center-left parties to come up with the ways to pressure those center-left parties to reject even more neoliberal ways of thinking as the current crisis unfolds. I would hope that the parties of the left would make electoral gains during this period through policies that offer greater economic security in a time of rampant insecurity, and that those gains would compel the parties of the center-left to look to their left rather than their right in the formation of new governments.

I suspect the coming economic crisis will take a particularly heavy toll on the career aspirations and economic prospects of the young, and access to higher education and decent jobs should certainly be a priority for left and center left alike.

Question 2

As I suggested in my previous answer, this question makes little to no sense in the context of U.S. politics as it has existed for the past 30 years and as it exists today. Certainly, the U.S. left is unified on the subject of rebuilding organized labor, and may have to battle some elements of the Democratic coalition on this question. But on the whole, virtually every Democratic elected official has embraced this goal as well – because a stronger labor movement clearly strengthens the center-left (that is, the Democratic Party). More broadly, however, the left in the U.S. last demonstrated against a center-left government at Seattle in 1999. Today, much of the center-left (including, during the Democratic primaries, Hillary Clinton) has repudiated the kind of trade accords that the Clinton presidency promoted and signed. Certainly, the left will need to scrutinize the emerging policies of an Obama administration, but for now, Obama has embraced an attenuated version of the left's critique of *laissez faire*, as has much of his party. There is no social grouping or political tendency in the U.S., however, that challenges capitalism as such. One consequence of the current global economic crisis is that parties of the center-left, and for that matter the center-right, have been forced to repudiate many of the governing ideas of the Reagan-Thatcher age and to move, either forward or back, to more a Keynesian framework. Here in the U.S., it's impossible to discern what conservative economics consists of at this point. Certainly, the left should itself advocate and lean on the center left to advocate as well the reformation of Anglo-American capitalism, which has subordinated the legitimate concerns of all

stakeholders to those of stock speculators.

I remain unconvinced that the socialist left is really anything more than a militant social democratic tendency at a time when the center-left throughout Europe has drifted from social-democratic tenets to neoliberalism. That is, the difference between the two tendencies is not that one is revolutionary and one is not, but rather that one supports a more democratic and social capitalism, and the other supports diminishing the social character of European capitalism. If the parties of the center left persist in neoliberal policies as the economy continues to implode, I expect the parties of the socialist left to make gains. But the parties of the center left are already creeping back to some of the values and perspectives they once held. The fate of the more avowedly socialist parties depends, I suspect, on just how far the center-left parties move. If they recapture some of their social democratic past, updated for the 21st century, I would imagine some of them would be more willing to enter coalitions with socialist parties – which would be good, up to a point, for those socialist parties. If the parties of the center-left don't adjust to the crisis, particularly if the crisis continues to worsen, then the socialist parties truly have an opportunity to grow – though again, I'd insist, as parties advocating a more social democratic than socialist perspective.

Question 3

Within the U.S., governmental action to expand health insurance to near-universal levels would go quite a ways towards re-legitimizing government as a force for good in the U.S. Obama has called for a public program to compete against private plans, and that would help re-legitimate government as well. The current downturn also provides the next administration with an opportunity to fund a new engine for the U.S. economy – a governmentally-sponsored alternative energy industry. A center-left party like the Democrats is likely to deny that such a program constitutes government intervention in the economy, though it is precisely that. In America, even a government that increases the social provision of goods or that engenders a new industry tends to deny that it is altering the laissez-faire verities on which the nation is supposedly based. That said, Americans do want a government more competent than the one that let New Orleans slowly drown. In a nation only now accustoming itself to the notion that Ronald Reagan's description of government as "the problem" was problematic itself, the re-legitimation of government is a necessary first step to dethrone the market.

The downturn and Wall Street's fall from grace also provide an opportunity to expand the public sector, and both the number and prestige of alternative public service careers for young people. The passage of labor-law reform would restore some bargaining power to American workers, who benefited not at all

from the rise in stock prices that preceded their fall. The creation of publicly held community development banks – extending the principle of public control of banks now that the Bush Administration has moved in that direction – could create institutions that could fund local development without engaging in the kinds of practices that toppled our financial system.

Question 4

Again, I think one of the most promising developments in the world left is the growth of cross-border unions or proto-unions. Just as it took national unions to deal with national corporations and to build viable national economies, it will require global unions to humanize global capitalism. Unions should be encouraged to form global works councils and use their leverage to thereby raise global labor standards. Similarly, greater cross-border coordination of environmental movements is to be encouraged, too.

Andrea Montagni

Question 1

The main strength of the European left (I am speaking of western Europe) is without doubt the existence of large trade-union organisations with millions of members. To this should be added the existence to a greater or lesser extent in nearly all of the countries of a social model based on welfare policies and whose universal coverage neoliberal policies have reshaped or diluted but not destroyed. Finally, there is a strong socialist tradition, be it social-democratic or communist) in civil society.

Obviously, in the current moment, in particular in Italy, but I believe to some extent in all of Europe - with differences due to particular situations (including the history of the labour movement and of left political parties) - we are, after the crisis of the so-called socialist countries in 1989, witnessing a dominance of "humanitarian" and non-materialist inter-class socialism, above all among the new generations of activists and in the mass movements. One example is the difficulty many have in defining themselves as communist. (The particular history of the Italian Socialist Party makes it just as difficult to left activists to define themselves as "socialist".) In the case of Italy, one has always to stress that the main left party (today dissolved), the PCI (Italian Communist Party), although on an ideological level a "workers" party, had in the post-W W II era become an inter-class party which contained within it leaders of the labour movement, and in this way it *also* represented the working class ... This inter-class character is very strong in the Italian left.

By "inter-classist" I do not mean a party which in addition to the workers also organises other sectors of the world of work (farmers, artesans, private and public employees, intellectuals); I mean a party which absorbs in its own core sectors of the entrepreneurial bourgeoisie, business and the free professions ...). Clearly, modern left theorising on the positive character of self-managed autonomous labour, on entrepreneurial creativity and on labour through cooperatives is part of the Italian left's historical heritage, but it should also be said that over the years hegemony in organisations of artisans and small entrepreneurs was won by anti-tax and market deregulation positions,

as expressions of the more entrepreneurial, and capitalist, part of the artisans, this by number of employees and by the corporate form of the enterprise. It should also be pointed out that cooperative enterprises have been transformed into capitalist enterprises run by managers formally elected by boards of directors. In sum, they have become capitalist enterprises without capitalist individuals, but with a collective capitalist instead.

Despite its being led by a communist party which was always in opposition, the Italian left's experience has fundamentally been a reformist experience, and the left reached its maximum strength in phases of growth and development. The economic crisis does not boost a left of this sort. On the contrary, neoliberal policies and economic crises are a mixture that help weaken the left, because in the working classes - large parts of which make up not only the lower-middle strata, but also the middle stratum of society - a fear of the future dominates along with the need to defend standards of living achieved by the post-war generations. It is a phenomenon that has previously been seen in Europe after the first world war and which, as it did then, feeds that chauvinism which in the era of globalisation takes on the form of racism and hatred of immigrants, the most openly reactionary form of this phenomenon.

In this context, the ideological crisis of the communist and socialist inspired left is an enormous factor for weakness, because what is missing is an alternative notion of society, which could restore hope. Although it did not produce significant results in terms of perspectives, it has nevertheless been shown in recent years that in the area of the organised labour movement (in Italy within a crisis of the political left this means the union, and chiefly the CGIL) it is possible to build a convergent practice between specific social movements (the anti-war movement, the environmental movement and the local committees [opposing high-speed trains, incinerators, etc. *ed. note*], movements for civil rights, etc.), identifying a unifying perspective - not a simple goal!

In Italy this perspective has been the extension of welfare policies (not the mere defense of what exists) and the overturning of the governing right wing. There is no doubt that the central question for the left is a political one, because from the theoretical point of view the analysis of capitalism and imperialism has been proven to be historically valid, while what is missing is the proposal for an alternative society and a political strategy after the collapse of the social-democratic and communist experiences of the last century. I should add that although it is on the same level from the point of view of method, I think one should take as already given the critique of social-democracy after 1917 and think

instead of how to resume, and draw up a balance sheet of, the communist experience.

The locus that fills this need to give strategic responses is doubtless a party, because a party is physically the place which brings together the need to develop theory - to then be transformed into political practice - and to gather together activists, as far as they are a living expression of society, and in the first place of the working class and its organisations. From this point of view, the left party has necessarily to be a mass party, in its composition and its rootedness, while it has to be a "vanguard" in the sense of indicating clearly its alternative character in respect to a society divided into classes. I look with great interest at the experience of the German left, and appreciate its relatively significant unitary capacity to attract German socialist forces into a single party capable of being a critical mass, and I note that an analogous attempt - actually initiated first in Italy - ended in a clamorous *débat* for two reasons, both of them subjective:

The first goes back to a particularly virulent and modern form of "parliamentary cretinism" which is not realised through politics (the illusion that parliament is the place where all social contradictions are resolved), but through the daily practice of becoming part of the "nomenklatura", which gradually becomes the unconscious goal of the left's political class, through which all parties end by becoming self-referential, not in terms of its body of activists, but of that minority that holds institutional offices (parliamentarians, public administrators, etc.) which, in the end, places their own fate before any perspective of unity.

The second reason comes from the failure of the left's participation in the national government. In Europe, while at the parliamentary level there is a single group representing the left in the European Parliament, there are two different coordinations of left forces: a formal one, the "European Left", which groups communist parties, socialists and ecologists, and an informal one consisting of communist parties.

The two Italian parties, the Partito della Rifondazione Comunista (PRC) and Partito dei Comunisti Italiani (PdCI), are part of the first (the PRC as the "Italian section", the PdCI as an "observer"), while the PdCI is more integrated in the coordination organised by certain communist parties. Both take part in the unified group in the European Parliament. In Europe, we must work for an integration of the left.

I think that it would be an error to promote a process directed toward the parties that are part of the European Socialist Party.

Question 2

As I said, the highest point reached by the left in Italy coincided with the period of development and industrialisation after W W II - in particular, when the first centre-left government was formed in Italy with a parliament elected by proportional representation that was nearly total, with a perfect balance of powers between executive and legislature. From the opposition, the left contributed to the country's most important reforms, from nationalisation of electrical energy to school and health reform. A legislation supporting workers rights - including within the workplace - was established. The unions achieved their maximum growth, the PCI became a major electoral power, and in the country there was a widespread social left which was expressed also through extreme-left formations. This situation continued for 30 years. In all of this period, wages grew, the standard of living of the masses improved, the upper strata of the working class and the working petite bourgeoisie, public employees, teachers, etc.) became a middle stratum. After the crisis of 1989, the breakdown of the PCI and its transformation first into a party of openly social-democratic orientation and then into a "democratic" type party based on the US Democratic Party did not spell an automatic collapse of the labour movement. The union kept its strength, the PCI's left wing, and what remained of the extreme left, gave birth to a new communist party (PRC) which, up to the change of the electoral law providing for a majoritarian system, had significant electoral weight; broad mass movements developed, starting with, and built around, union demands but with great prominence on the terrain of the struggle against imperialist globalisation (around the WSF) and that of democracy and civil rights and - due to the specifically Italian problem of the rise of Silvio Berlusconi - in the area of the judiciary and against corruption.

The Italian left made of the anti-fascist axiom a fundamental and very prominent element of its own politics, to the extent that the communist party (i.e. PRC), underestimating how sensitive the left constituency is on this issue, split (into PRC and PdCI) when it decided to let the Prodi government fall in 1998 - and then, to come out of its consequent social isolation, had to support and re-enter the Prodi government in 2006, justifying this by maintaining that the new Prodi administration would be more left than the last one. To save face, the PRC leadership group justified their own support of the new Prodi government by maintaining that the world had changed and that it was possible, by way of the movements, to influence the government by pushing socially transformative policies. The disillusion was such as to cause the entire

Italian left to be swept away, and they disappeared from parliament, thanks to a majoritarian electoral law, but also to a loss of two-thirds of their own electorate. My view is that the vaunted "permeability" of the political establishment to the movements does not exist. There is the problem that the left must have its own strategy and its own social transformational programme that needs clearly to be indicated to the population and to which its own political action must conform.

The question of government contains this dilemma: An anti-fascist coalition is a necessary but insufficient condition for a social-reform project, because not all anti-fascist forces, e.g. centrists, are for changing society. A successful, broad coalition around social reforms may require giving up the anti-fascist axiom. Either an anti-fascist bloc, as in the Italian case, or the call for social reforms. *Tertium datur?*

It may be that the first condition will not be understood by the great mass of people, and that one has to pay the consequences for this, but it cannot be evaded. For the left, opposition to war and fascism are questions from which there can be no retreat, even at the cost of "unpopularity" among growing sectors of the population. The question then becomes how to make the anti-fascist line "digestible" seeking compromises on the level of action, but this cannot ever mean renunciation of open conflict with reaction. However "unrealistic" it may seem, the left can never give up relationships with centrist and moderate political forces and must avoid taking refuge in a sermonising maximalism that condemns it to social and political marginality. The fundamental question remains that of defining a "societal alternative".

Question 3

A left party must therefore in the first place propose an idea of a socialist and egalitarian society. Without this idea it is not possible to win over activists, above all from the new generations. The capitalist crisis offers us the possibility of resuming and making popular again the Marxist critique of class society. The historical experience of the labour movement offers a social model (labour as a foundation of rights, the system of solidaristic welfare, rejection of war, participatory democracy) that provides a background - "minimal programme" as it was once called - for daily political action and political struggle. The political circumstances are pointing out the terrain for agitation: the struggle against the financial sharks, the defence of the social state and of workers rights, opposition to war. If one has to establish an order of broad demands, I would give the following:

- rejection of war as an instrument of the the resolution of international conflicts
- the right to social security and health provisions
- short-term unemployment benefits and long-term unemployment benefits [“disoccupazione” and “inoccupazione”]
- the right to a job
- the right to a [national] collective wage contract
- civil Rights: (in order: the right to vote; recognition and valorisation of gender differences on basis of unequal rights; no discrimination on the basis of diverse sexual behaviour; no discrimination based on religion - i.e. secular state.

The current crisis offers an opportunity to put forward anti-capitalist proposals:

- Compulsory use of funds taken from capital assets to cover the expenses of supporting the credit system and financing productive activities;
- The nationalisation of the banks in risk of failing;
- A state policy of support for research and innovation.

To effectively impose these demands a left, anti-capitalist, anti-imperialist left and socialist party is needed. This necessitates in turn an alternative ideal that motivates activists, that makes people want to join such a party, that has its own grassroots activity in society and in the organised and spontaneous social movements of civil society, (churches, tenants movements, etc., etc.), and that is not just an electoral machine. However, before all that has already been said above we need a study of political economy and of the international tendencies, of the individual countries and groups of countries, not a simulacrum of a study but a scientific reading that utilises disciplines ranging from economics, statistics, ecology, sociology, anthropology, psychology and demography, to investigate the transformations of economy and society at all levels.

We need a capacity to analyze social classes, their social role, their relation to the distribution of wealth, their life conditions and their quantitative and qualitative composition according to gender, nationalities and cultural identities, age group, educational level, etc. All of this so as to develop politics of alliance and programmes of action that free the left from pauperism [ed.: a cult of poverty and oppression] often of religious or tiermondiste origin, that frequently occasion the under-valorising of class contradictions in respect to other contradictions.

Question 4

Initiatives like today's are useful, but - so that each initiative does not become like all others, ending by creating multiple similar initiatives without distinctive features and to prevent them from becoming unintelligible, and to give them specificity, I think that the current initiative should position itself on the terrain of discussion and confrontation of ideas and experiences aimed at the reconstruction of a socialist thinking and praxis, developing Marxist theory in a way that we do not fall back into a pre-Marxian socialist naiveté, so that new research does not - as often happens in the alter-mondialiste movement - set out on roads already travelled - as if no critique of these has already occurred - paradoxically thus rediscovering Fourier, Saint-Simon or Bakunin. At the same time, this thinking and praxis must live on a strong connection to the labour movement and must understand labour as the foundation of its own capacity to have a hold on society. The left in the highly-developed imperialist countries (USA, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, Europe, Japan) has first to promote an organised discussion that confronts theories, strategic hypotheses and tactical choices.

The coordinations between parties and transnational forms are [not in bad shape = vanno bene?]; they are useful instruments that need to be strengthened. It's up to the US comrades to explain to us and make comprehensible the very particular modes of class struggle in their country and of the political representation of social conflict, so different from that of Europe. We have to understand if theirs is a unique modality or if it prefigures the future of all of the western world. It's up to the European comrades to justify anew the existence of an organised labour movement with its own unions and its own parties of socialist or communist orientation. It remains to investigate and understand the sense of a socialist reawakening in the economically dependent countries of Latin America and Asia and to investigate if and how Islamic religious fundamentalism represents the modern form through which emergent reactionary forces in raw-material-supplying countries contend with US and European imperialism, by confronting the latter with a new kind of rebellion of broad masses in the dependent countries ...Finally, we need to study the economies of countries who define themselves as still socialist, in order to understand if their type of modernisation will be one of monopolistic capitalism or a capitalism of a socialistic kind.

Gian Paolo Patta

The Italian left has gone into crisis whenever it supported a centre-left government; it has never been able to handle these government experiences. Generally, it was hit by splits and by the abstentionism of its own electorate. The Italian left has grown or recovered from drops in consensus when it developed an oppositional politics in a dialectal relationship to the movements. It was, however, compelled to confront the problem of an alliance with the centre-left, driven as it was by the particular Italian electoral law (percentage-hurdle and the permitting of alliances among parties) as well as by the strong anti-Berlusconian feeling of its own electorate. If it were to have refused an alliance indispensable for beating Berlusconi it would have paid a dramatic and perhaps definitive price. The limitations of its size, along with the difficulty of finding a strategy that compels the centre-left to high-level agreements, always complicates attempts at alliance. The main difficulty in coming up with a realistic politics to face this situation comes from the ideological and cultural fragmentation peculiar to the Italian left, which is the result of both an old and more recent history. It has not succeeded in renewing itself as far as its cultural and programmatic framework is concerned. The dominant part of the Italian left has, moreover, a movementist vision that often brings it into conflict with the large mass trade-union organisations over which it does not exercise hegemony. The role of the Italian left is nevertheless crucial for establishing alliances capable of beating the centre-right. Clearly, an alliance of the centre-left and left is an indispensable condition. The centre-left itself pays heavy prices for its incapacity to come to agreements with the left. I believe that the basis for a cooperation with the Partito Democratico can be the defence of the European social model (which is not very strong in Italy), increasing the income of workers (in Italy real wages have been stagnant for 10 years) and the reduction of precarious work. To achieve results in these areas the support of the big unions is indispensable. Having the capacity to govern the country without coming into conflict with union organisations presupposes a rootedness in society which the present Italian left does not have. The Italian left is largely an arena of opinion which has not completely clarified its nature and its relationship to workers. In the Italian left, one frequently hears denials of the centrality of wage labour,

as well as extreme rejectionist criticisms of 19th- and 20th-century left history. The “multitudes” and the movements are thought to be the new subjects that one should relate to.

The retreat from the centrality of labour usually takes the form of viewing labour as being central only when the workers are fully conscious of themselves and thus play a strong autonomous political role, carrying out a strong initiative of mobilisation for change. According to this politicistic [*editor's note*: “politicistic” is the opposite of “economistic”] vision, the various extant subjects within a social formation become central only to the extent that they come alive, are active and mobilise themselves. This view in its substance denies the structural centrality within a capitalist formation of the capital-labour contradiction. In my view, the latter does not exist on the basis of its self-awareness; it just does exist, and that is all.

This means that even when the world of work does not have a clear perspective on itself and its own economic and political representation is weak, anyone who wants to change capitalist society cannot avoid considering central for his/her own effort constructing the class per se.

In the 150 years of its own history the labour movement has had highs and lows, victories and defeats. Profound attempts at creating a new world took place. These never succeeded but they involved the whole planet and billions of human beings. The failures were of such a dimension that long periods of reflection were inevitable in order to emerge from the ensuing crises. The labour movement's absence from the international scene has left the field free for liberalism and individualism, and it has not been occupied by other movements if not in an episodic although significant manner and limited to specific themes. These movements have not gone beyond the expression of values shared by most of us and a critique of some of the consequences of modern capitalist development. Even the social forum has never generated an organically alternative vision of capitalist society; the forums were self-described as meeting places for diverse subjects seeking a common denominator for the achievement of unified mobilisations.

I believe that the new movements are fundamental for keeping alive a critique of the consequences of capitalist development and for limiting its damage through mobilisation, and that they represent indispensable meeting places for the growth of a global critique of the development model. Stressing the centrality of labour therefore does not mean counterposing it to the important subjectivities that have expressed themselves and will do so in the future, nor does it mean under-valuing their critical and original contribution. Stressing the centrality of labour

means underlining the nature of capitalist society, which has never changed in terms of its fundamentals, and to indicate the subject that can overcome it or can effectively condition it. We therefore reject the idea of a splendid isolation for workers. What we instead need is a comprehensive analysis of the concrete capitalist formations to identify, on the basis of the latter's contradictions, the subjects, the social strata and the movements which can build, together with the workers, the social bloc for change. The residual organisations of the left must, however, be committed to including inside their organisations a significant quantity of workers, according them a structural role, and to launching a critical but positive dialectic with the existing union organisations. Defending the gains of the post-war period, threatened by liberalism and its crisis, is the indispensable condition for new progress, and it can not be considered a backward position.

The worldwide crisis of capitalism, and particularly of its financialisation, offers an opportunity to settle accounts with liberalism and its recipe for globalisation. In the immediate future we at least need to relaunch Keynesian policies: public intervention in the economy and subsidy for workers and pensioners income. We would need a regulation of financial markets to avoid a repetition of the colossal fraud we have experienced, a penalisation, including fiscally, of financial activities in favour of productive investments. The left has to fight for the emphatic relaunching of European unity, re-establishing the values of internationalism and peace. The justified criticism made in the last years of the European constitutional proposals and of its liberalism cannot stop this historic process of great importance for the world and for workers. Moreover, the national constitutions which are formally superior to the one proposed for Europe have not impeded the liberalism of the last 20 years on a world and a national level. In times of crisis, the rebirth of the nationalism of fatherlands can be lethal for democracy and can deeply divide the workers.

Rainer Schultz

Question 1

The two major challenges and at the same time, opportunities for the European/North American left (though, of course, not only the left) are currently the financial crisis and the environmental/energy crisis. (For the southern left the energetic crisis is more dramatically tied to health and food sovereignty). To bring these two issues together, take advantage of the vast, ongoing and plural forms of media coverage of these topics provide a great chance for the left to intervene in strategic debates that go beyond the usual dimensions of influence. This unique historical opportunity has not been exploited sufficiently.

Analysts and specialists of the left have been working on both topics for a long time and accumulated a wealth of expertise, detailed knowledge, campaign experience etc. that has to be used, applied and made public to a much greater extent. It is surprising that in times of a constant coverage and wide-spread concern about oil/fuel prices, climate change etc. there has not been a national/international campaign to question the current forms of transportation and environmental policies (such as for example in the 1980s when the first official reports on the deterioration of German forests initiated a nation-wide campaign where millions of people decided to visualize their awareness of the problem and readiness for change through car stickers, voluntary restrictions, etc.).

It is contradictory and a very useful example for the systemic limitations of contemporary capitalist societies in which the lobbies of oil, car and plane industries continue to be highly influential that although there is a rising demand for public transportation (Amtrak, Deutsche Bahn, city transport etc.) these means of transport continue to be privatized, prices being raised and services often cut back. The US presidential campaign and the German debate on then railway privatization would have been great opportunities to exploit the topic and continue more immediate, short term demands of the concrete single-issue movements (e.g. the different movements against privatization, environmental groups etc.) and combine these with a more long-term transformative horizon.

In this sense, the transatlantic leftist initiative for which this questionnaire has been developed should work on its function as 'organic intel-

lectuals' that is, developing its capacities (and those of its institutions/movements connected to it) that are able to translate and mediate between different social groups that have concrete concerns affecting their everyday life (e.g. transportation costs through rising gas prices) with an alternative political formulation. Campaigns, plural forums, public debates challenging politicians, intervention into the mainstream media are important aspects of it. Other, alternative political spaces, such as the social forums continue to be important but they reach only those people that are already relatively speaking politically aware and active. The lack or limits of this undertaking so far represents at the same time a major weakness. Many leftist organizations tend to specialize extensively on certain highly interesting and important topics and often unlearn the ability to intervene in public debates, to maintain or develop a dialogue with other, similar groups and connect to the concerns of the common sense. Great social crises such as the two aforementioned are great opportunities to overcome this. They provide a unique opportunity since the usual explanations are increasingly being questioned and there is a search for alternative ways of interpreting reality. Many people are currently waiting for a lucid, intelligible leftist interpretation of the financial crisis.

Question 2

Where the left is represented in national or regional parliaments it has to use these forums to polarize debates with far-reaching, clearly alternative and yet sound reform projects. Where it is not, such as in the US, pressure to launch more far-reaching demands should be inserted through public intellectuals, remarkable events and campaigns especially in times of crisis, national debates etc. Images of protest at Wall Street were transported all over the world during the current crisis. The camping at Bush's ranch has become a symbol of anti-war efforts globally. Yet beyond these symbolic, action-oriented moments it is often hard to bring specific demands into mainstream media and reach people beyond the current level of influence of the left. More long-term oriented strategies, such as the present effort of the German Left Party's student group SDS to launch nation-wide reading courses of the Capital at the universities in times of economic crisis, seem very promising.

Obviously the left that is not only present in the parliament to increase pressure on the government but actually tolerates or participates in it – such as has been the case in Spain, Italy, France, etc. – Germany on a state-level. Where it does, it has lost a considerable amount of credibility and support. In Berlin alone the Left Party/PDS lost half of its mem-

bers/voters mainly due to its 'forced' participation in reforms that had very negative social effects. Two comments on this phenomenon: It is not always wise to prove the ability to govern (*Regierungsfähigkeit*) and then find yourself in a situation where the relation of forces on a national and global level do not permit a more progressive policy, or at best, slight, often cosmetic changes. Another weakness in West-European left-government participation experience has been the neglect of interaction with and organic links to social movements as a means to maintain constant social pressure. The MST in Brazil is a useful counter-example of the ability to operate with antinomies. Even though they supported the candidacy of Lula and provincial candidates of the PT against the more conservative alternative they would always intervene in local campaign events and debates with their own demands and mobilize their own constituency. Some organic intellectuals who used to live in occupied MST communities are now members of regional parliaments, often still live among their social origins or at least constantly visit and interact with them. They are an important link for social movements and organizations to facilitate and protect their own work. For a more systematic participation on a national level the MST has clear minimum standards and political requirements that have to be fulfilled, otherwise it does not consider to collaborate. For Germany, these might include withdrawal of soldiers, undoing of recent privatization of public goods and the reforms in the German social system, as well as clear, identifiable transformative programs and the development of an alternative social scenario. A familiarization of the political work, tools, mechanisms within parliaments, ministries, commissions etc. and other state agencies using their resources while at the same time continue to raise political awareness, facilitate organization, intervene and interact with social and political movements seems to be the best strategy of revolutionary realistic policy and a contribution to a more long-term oriented building of a hegemonic block that would be able to transform the general conditions in which leftist forces could 'govern'.

Question 3

For this question I want to limit myself to one major instrument that could greatly help to facilitate the development of the programmatic components and increase the level of identification of people with it. I am referring to the use of the internet to advance, expand and make more participatory the program of leftist parties and other forces. It is surprising that in the 21st century where the internet has become the

main mean of communication and information in the developed countries it has not been used more by leftist forces.

I am writing these lines currently from Cuba (I am working on my dissertation) - a place that is well known for its limitations of real participation, open public debates, surveys etc. which are subject to very special conditions. However, it is little known that over the last years during times of an increased pressure to reform and in preparation for the next congress of the communist party in 2009 (which for great political and economic problems had been postponed for ten years) there were several nation-wide debates in work-centers, party levels, universities, and many other institutions where fundamental critique was expressed and recorded and currently being analyze and processed; it includes certain initiatives of the government (e.g. the current pension reforms) that are being debated. The problem here is that these debates or not public and published and there is no guarantee that certain demands are being taken into consideration by higher authorities.

The method however to have far-reaching debates on important political questions and reform suggestions could be easily carried out in Europe-North America through the internet. These forms of debate should be used more extensively, especially for political parties. Debates on party programs, but also forms and contents of planned or ongoing campaigns, parliamentary initiatives etc. would have a very different character and level of identification (and thus support) if people are given the real opportunity to participate and see their efforts reflected in one form or the other. It would be an adequate, modern and participatory form of democracy that can be used by the left.

Question 4

Since the concrete political-social situation and composition of the political actors and conditions varies considerably on a certain level of analysis it is not recommendable to adapt and discuss day-to-day policies and initiatives. I think three major elements could be pursued further: a) the sharing of experience in political work, campaigns, etc. and the critical evaluation and analysis thereof; this might lead to b) a selective cooperation on some major topics with global impact, such as the world-wide demonstrations against the war in Iraq or possible actions for climate policies or a change in energy and transportation policies that might be combined with the traditional and new labor unions, since it is not only high-tech capitalism that is increasingly operating on an international level, but the social forces should do so, too. If workers of Walmart in China and the US could support each other with their mutual concerns –

e.g. labor rights, unionization, environmental and social standards – it would have a tremendous and powerful effect; c) a more systematic cooperation between critical, plural leftist journals, foundations, organizations etc. that cover and analyze a wide range of political, economic, and social topics and of which both, specific texts and analysis can be shared, circulated or even be produced collectively with an international dimension and division of labor; as well the sharing/cooperation of critical intellectuals who work in these contacts and might travel to talk about certain topics and recent analysis; these journeys could be more effective (both politically and in terms of costs) if prepared and carried out collectively.

Thomas Seibert

1. Starting with the good thing: Our strength, in this period/at the given moment.

To clarify the categories of “political left” and “social left” and to understand the given strength of both we first have to take “ourselves” into account “ as – at least by intention - “double agents” spanning the political and the social left. That is: we’ve to take into account our specific responsibility for the further development of relations between the political and the social left. Saying this, we also have to take into account that in Germany (as well as in many other countries) we’re already engaged in a re-defining of these relations, because we’re already engaged in creating a *new* political left and a *new* social left. Its worth noting here, that the strength of the left in Germany at the moment is embodied exactly in the “communicating vessels” between the new political left and the new social left.

1.1.

The new political left in Germany is to be found in DIE LINKE. This is true *as far as* the party really tries to become a party of a “new type”: neither a social-democratic, nor a marxist-leninist one, but... .

Central point in this game: A political left trying to find a new relationship to the social left. What is the idea? Having a party, that is in itself *both* an electoral party *and* a movement-oriented party. Worth noting that in this respect in Germany we’re already working out our second try – after that of the Green Party, the very first project of a party like this. As an electoral party it is clearly directed towards the bourgeois state and towards state politics. Therefore it has to accept three fundamental conditions of its own very existence:

a.) The party *on the one hand* has to acknowledge the limits of state politics, that is, the limits of the bourgeois state in its given form, and has to view itself as a specific state apparatus. To come to the point: The party has to direct itself towards government politics, even before joining government. That is: just to play the role of a “fundamental opposition” is not at all sufficient, a waste of time and resources. But:

b.) The party is not only forced to fulfil its role as a state apparatus, it has to acknowledge its actual role as a minor player within the given constellation of political parties. In order to join governmental politics, it

has to direct itself towards cooperation with centre-left parties (in Germany the Social-Democrats and Greens). So, the party has to view itself not only as a state apparatus, but as a weak state apparatus compared to others. And: it has to take into account the given weakness of its cooperation partners. Not too funny, all in all.

c.) The only way to get in *and* out of this mess is opened up by the fundamental insight that the limits of the state in general, and therefore the limits of the party's own position as a certain state apparatus in relation to others, are primarily defined by the intensity of social struggles, those within the state and its apparatuses, as well as those against the state. Therefore: While decisively and seriously affirming its own limits as a state apparatus - that is, as an electoral party -, it has *at the same time* or *on the other hand* to reach out to its concrete possibilities as a movement-oriented party. **Note here:** *We don't have a "new-type party" like this: we're on our way to inventing it and we're forced to do so.*

If one takes this seriously, two consequences have to be recognized:

a.) In order to fulfil its own role as an electoral *and* as a movement-oriented party, the party has to open itself up to those social forces it needs to get its own job done. *A problem of communication.*

b.) To start with this communication, the party and its social allies have to create the media and the possibilities needed. *A problem of organization.* To put it differently: a party like this has to be organized *from within and from outside.* Its not enough just to be the party.

1.2.

I would like to define the new social left and its specific strength by the concept "movement of the movements" – one of the concepts used to identify what in English is otherwise called "global justice movements" (in German: "globalisierungskritische Bewegung", in French: "altermondialist movements"). I prefer this concept because it has to be understood also in relation to two others: the concept of the "new social movements" (women's movements, youth movements, environmental movements and all the other movements which by their quality, not by quantity have to be defined as "minority movements") *and* the concept of the "old social movement", that is: the "traditional" labour movement. I don't want to promote a "dialectic" here: the three forms of movements and the movements themselves are not "stages" following each other. But I do want to emphasize what a breakthrough the "movement of movements" was and what its wager is:

"Whatever you are fighting for or against, you can't avoid fighting global capitalism!"

opens up the possibility of bridging the gap between old social movement and new social movements. That gap was the main reason for the failure of the Green Party (besides the corruption of its cadres). If the altermondialist “wager” is right, we (and the movements themselves) have to think of *all* the movements as forces *potentially* fighting the given formation of capitalism - *each in its own way*. Of course, this was already the right way to think about them in the period of the new social movements – but for several reasons was not adequately acknowledged then. *Today we don't need to introduce this unifying element: its already there. That's the difference.* This is the first point we have to make in considering the specific strength of the actual social left.

The second point of strength is, that to built up a “movement of movements” does *not at all* mean to form a coalition that *first* brings together the old social movement and the new social movements and *then* create a political left (a party) to work it out in “true” politics. *No!* To built up a “movement of movements” means to scrutinize the difference between the social and the political left. Not: to eliminate it, but: to redefine it. The movements themselves took the first step by creating specific organs which have at least the potential to take over this job from within. This is the point made by the social forums, but also through the invention of the specific form of organisation worked out by the attac-network, by certain non-governmental organisations or – in Germany - by inventing the “post-autonomous” network of the “Interventionist Left” (IL). **Note here:** *Of course all these changes on the side of the movements as well as on the party's side are not only inventions by political intention, but are reflections of the fundamental modifications of capitalism in the last decades. The concept I find useful to use here is that of “biopolitical” capitalism, indicating a form of capitalism in which all social life has become a “work force”, that is: a means of production. This means that the division into “production” and “reproduction” is no longer useful. Of course, these modifications themselves reflect social struggles – especially those of the new social movements from the 1960s to the 1980s. So we're moving within a circle, but not within a circulus vitiosus... .*

2. To confront the bad thing: Our weaknesses, in this period/at the given moment.

Becoming manifest in the period after Seattle, Genoa and Florence and thereby coming from the background of one the deepest crises the left historically ever had to survive, the “movement of the movements” up

to now has not *experienced* what it means *to win a victory*. Therefore it has no clear notion of what it means to “gain power”, and that denotes exactly its fundamental weakness.

2.1.

The most important experience up to now: There was an idea (articulated not only but prominently by Arundhati Roy) during the global resistance against the US invasion of Iraq, that it *may* and that it *must* be possible to stop the invasion by the global action of the movements itself – and by the effect they would have internationally on the politics of governments. The idea was that given sufficiently strong and broad global action, it ought to have been possible to bring down Hessein’s regime by a democratic revolution inside Iraq. Of course, this “project” – never elaborated in a decisive way – failed. Since then, the movements still have not solved the question of what it may mean to win a victory. Our problem: We have to think this question in “big” and in “small” ways at the same time:

a.) What does it mean to really organize global action, directed towards the global empire/imperialism?

b.) What does it mean to ground such a global action in local actions, on different levels, somehow suggested by the organizational structure of the social forums (global, continental, national, local)?

2.2.

Before the so called “financial crisis” I had four ideas for answers to these questions:

a.) To initiate a discussion precisely of these questions, that is: to initiate a discussion on what it means for us to “gain power”. The idea, just to give a kind of conceptual impression, would be to launch a kind of “zapatista-anti-zapatista” move, which would be a neo-post-leninist move.

b.) To initiate this discussion being aware that we need to acknowledge *the empty place left* by the disappearance of the concepts “socialism” and/or “communism” after 1989. To articulate this point in the language of the movements themselves: we urgently need to find answers to the questions implicit in our main slogan: “Another world is possible”: “Fine, but what kind?” The first attempts at answers – to my mind - are the discussions around concepts like “Global Social Rights”, “Global Public Goods”, “Guaranteed Social Infrastructure”, “Guaranteed Social Income” etc.pp.

c.) To explore both these discussion within a third one used as a kind of “background discussion”: the discussion of the concrete meaning of the relations between the political and the social left today. Within this discourse I thought and still think that we have to find new answers to

all the old questions focused on the question "reform or revolution" or, the other way around, and with a bow to the rosa-luxemburg-foundation: what should be understood by "radical" or even "revolutionary 'Realpolitik'"?

d.) The starting point in bringing these three discussions together was – and therefore I still think we all have to keep in mind Arundhati Roy's suggestion - an agreement that *our first common task* has to be the *resistance to imperial(ist) war. At the moment I think we're forced to bring the question of war together with the question of crisis. So I think things have become better and worse at the same time.*

3. What is to be done?

To come back to ourselves here and thus back to the urgent question of how *pragmatically* to come to grips with the incoherence *and* the coherence of the social and the political left - that is, back to the search for our "major opportunities for strengthening the lefts": *We've to come back to the notion of "party" used by Marx and Engels in the "Communist Manifesto": The Communists do not form a separate party opposed to the other working-class parties.*

In order to re-state this within our own specific context we first have to understand this sentence as the formulation of an unreserved affirmation of the fundamental pluralism of the political and the social left in all respects and dimensions: there are always already and will always be several "working class parties", i.e. organised social, cultural and political formations *articulating* the class-for-itself. And we have to understand this not just for the sake of pluralism as such, but in order to work out the question of: What this means *today*? It does mean to *free* the political left (...) and the social left (...) to do their always limited and partial jobs.

For the political left this means accepting its ambivalent or even dubious task of being at the same time an electoral and a movement-oriented party and thus giving up any idea of taking over the "leadership". For the social left this means retaining the freedom as well as challenge to stick to "mere partial" or "minoritarian" issues and agendas without having the excuse that the political left will take over the process of universalisation and in doing so solve the question of power. **Note here:** *For the whole left this means that the question of "leadership" is to be solved "within" this everlasting plurality, by creating the possibilities, the organs and the networks which are able to do so.*

The term "communists" thus designates:

a.) those, who are already convinced that this is the task, and

b.) those, who have ideas and abilities that are adequate for *effectively* meeting this challenge.

“Our” problem in a nutshell: we know that we never can be sure, if we’re “communists” of type “a” or of type “b”. Therefore we have to accept not only the plurality of the social, cultural and political class-formations (“working-class parties”), but also the plurality of “communists”. **Not here:** *The pivot in question, to be taken absolutely seriously: This does **not at all** spare us from the need to make decisions and commitments: to decide is to decide the undecidable (otherwise we would work out a calculation and never decide).*

With this I’m back, as some of us know, to the idea of creating a “post-centrist centre”¹⁰ “Post-centrist”, because we have to accept that centrist politics itself will never end in the “re-unification” of the different “working-class parties” to form the one and only party. “Centre” because we have to build the relay system (and probably not only one) through which the ongoing plurality of “working-class parties” nevertheless can be “centred” – as far as *possible*, as far as *necessary*. This kind of “party” – really to be compared with the Manifesto’s “party” – is, as Althusser would have said, “not a subject, but a process”: The process of organising and then strengthening the “communicating vessels” between the political and the social left. How? By:

¹⁰ Centristism has a generally negative connotation within the Leninist (and Trotskyist) traditions, as it indicates positions that in mediating between or “centering” political positions in a party or between parties, also “waver” between revolutionary and reformist positions. After the split of the First International in World War I, the centrists were located in the so-called “2 and 1/5 International” which was then the left wing of the Social Democratic Party of Germany (SPD), and later also in the “right” wing of the German Communist Party (KPD). By each group opening up their own party to their counterparts in the other party, the centrists - themselves not united - tried to re-unify the labour movement either in the direction of the SPD or of the KPD. After the definitive failure of these attempts in the 1920s, and once again with the idea of rebuilding a united class-party, they founded their own parties (in the social-democratic direction, the Socialist Workers Party (SAP), on the communist side the German Communist Party-Opposition (KPD-O) - and they failed again. The prominent example outside Germany, characteristically centrist, as is clear from its very name, was Spain’s Workers Party of Marxist Unification (POUM). Being deeply convinced of the need to renew or, better, re-invent a “centrist” politics, I do not think that this means building a unified party. Instead, or perhaps even on the contrary, today’s centrists must bring together different forms and tendencies of left political activity *without* such a party. However, because at the same time they still have to aim at a *unificación marxista* by “waver” between so-called “reformist” and so-called “revolutionary” positions, I would use the term “post-centrist” - with all due irony, of course. This irony includes the realisation that “waver” in this way is not a sign of being “undecided” but an indication of mobility, agility and even flexibility, that is, being capable of deciding at the right moment.

a.) Networking, communicating, yes "leading" if necessary *and* if possible, that is, opening up and then deepening the process itself, by any adequate means - *while* not only accepting but respecting the autonomy of both the political and the social left.

b.) *Simply taking part*, everybody following her / his possibilities and duties.

c.) Opening up, here and now, to *the possibility* that is calling us.

Note here: *a single possibility, not: several possibilities.* Pluralism's limit: (*Editors note:* The art of doing this kind of politics means having the antennae and the agility to read the contradictory shifts in reality and read the openings. It is not a question of a cult of pluralism and of waiting for a continued ever-shifting plurality of solutions and actions. The point is to use this open and dialectical sensibility to feel out, prepare and seize the moment when the one major possibility opens up in which we focus and concentrate the potentials of our varied aspects and sectors to result in a qualitative breakthrough.)

4.) What is to be done in order to deal with the contradictions between the socialist left, centrist social democracy and the civil-society movements?

We have to fully face the need to do a, in the full sense of the word, merciless analysis of the terrible and awful failure not only of the *Partito della Rifondazione Comunista*, but of the whole Italian constellation, including - an admission due from my side - the failure of the "autonomia" cadres involved in this process. Could we have had a better starting point than the one in Genoa and Florence, and have we not gambled away this unique opportunity? We urgently need an open communication on the possibilities that have opened up for us in Germany at the moment - which then would be the crucial test of the possibility and the possibilities of a "post-centrist centrism" in this situation.

Two questions, just to start:

a.) I think Die LINKE has to stick to its "No!" to German wars. Is this possible? There would really seem to be no alternative to this.

b.) Is there a possibility within a *middle-range-perspective* to come back to the never worked out idea of some early Greens of having a "conditional-tolerance" coalition? This would mean that Die LINKE joins "red-red-green-coalitions" (Social-Democrat, LINKE and Green) while insisting only on one or two of its own positions *and* accepting the rest

of the government's positions in general, thus retaining its freedom to criticise precisely this rest of the programme – in public!¹¹

The two positions now could be: *no war*, of course, and something which goes *in the direction* of a socially guaranteed social infrastructure (“BürgerInnenversicherung” (“citizens insurance”), free and equal access of everyone to health care, education, dwelling, water/electricity, traffic and “culture”) *and* guaranteed individual income (in a mixture of “Existenzgeld”, minimum salary, general reduction of work time). **Note:** In the early days of the Greens, the Social-Democrats killed the “conditional tolerance” idea, and I think, they will do so again. Can we think of a strategy to get around this?

From the point of view of our possible common intervention, we could use a situation like this to work out the idea discussed in several places: the idea of carrying out a politics of “Richtungsforderungen” (“directional demands”[demands that policies be enacted or action undertaken that go in a certain direction]), similar but not identical to the Trotskyist idea of “transitional demands” – which than could be “answered” by DIE LINKE and others.

To give a hint: “transitional demands”, similar to the “minimal program” of early social-democracy, tried to take up the population's essential needs and desires in order to realise them in the here and now, that is, inside capitalism, and simultaneously already transform and at least transgress capitalism itself which cannot accept those demands. But the point was that the party was the author of the concrete slogans and programs articulating these demands and then handed them over to the people, trying to get their support, that is, get them organised and thus get them into the transformation process itself.

But: “directional demands” are those which not only take up needs and desires already present in the population but also the directional demands that are already out there in society, in the movements. That

¹¹ The Green Party experimented with this form of coalition in the 1980s. To be clear, a “tolerance” arrangement means that a party, for instance Die LINKE, can give its vote to another party, for instance the SPD, at the moment of forming a government, so as not to be responsible for impeding a Social-Democratic prime minister from being elected and permitting a CDU prime-minister instead. “Tolerance” is not coalition; there is no commitment past allowing the SPD candidate to become prime-minister. The innovation of “conditional tolerance” is that it requires the larger party to agree to supporting, say, two of the key demands of the smaller party. The smaller party then agrees mechanically to say “yes” to the larger party's programme without ever having to say yes to the individual programmes. At the same time, the smaller party gets to signal - publically - that it is only in government in order to push these two demands, and does not endorse many of the larger party's programmes, even if it won't actively oppose them within the legislature.

is, the concept of “directional demands” reflects a situation in which social initiatives and movements themselves, and in their perspective then leftist electoral parties, are always already articulating slogans and programs of this kind, so the point is not to create slogans and programs. Thus the task is to invent and then communicate compressions or condensations of these slogans and programs, working out their *implicit* transformational or transgressive “wager”.

For example, in the case of concrete slogans and programs for an “Existenzgeld”, worked out by the people themselves, its “wager” to compress or condense into a “directional demand” is the reaching out for a free and gratis individual existence as such, guaranteed to every individual by society as a whole.

Or, in the case of a “BürgerInnenversicherung”, worked out by left Social-Democrats, Greens, DIE LINKE, trade unions *and* their social constituency: its “wager” to compress or condense into a “directional demand” is the striving for a social infrastructure guaranteed to society as a whole by society as a whole. To have a discussion between concrete demands pointing in a capitalism-transgressing direction and a “directional demand” compressing its transgressing “wager” would then function as a “communication vessel” between the people themselves, the movements, the electoral party and their “communists”...

5. Besides party-politics...

...in the narrow sense we have to re-vitalise and deepen the “Heiligendamm Coalition” which is the “movement of the movements” in its actual form here: re-vitalise the attac-network by intensifying its move to the left while at the same time protecting its openness to the societal centre, safeguarding the openness of DIE LINKE even and exactly in a situation where it might happen that the party has to join coalition governments, getting the trade-unions on board, finding and creating possibilities of “popular action” on all levels, local, national, transnational, global, strengthening a “post-autonomous” left which could serve as a network of free cadres who always try to find the next possibility of radicalising the movements as well as the electoral party – and in doing so *limiting* itself to the role of a “scout” – but not a “vanguard” – building up a plural “leadership” criss-crossing all those layers of actions, discussions, movements, organisations... .

6. Transnational “communicating vessels”, we “ourselves”

Yes, of course. Let's do everything we need to do for ourselves: meetings, continuation of communication, common research and common “publications” in the broad sense of the word. Let's join, as far as possible, transnational action, for example, the mobilisation against the 60th NATO anniversary planned for 2006 in Straßburg/Kehl, which requires at least a communication process between the German and the French left and will create the possibility of having internal meetings as well as public ones in Straßburg/Kehl. Let's have a discussion of the crisis of the Social Forum-process.

Neil Smith

Question 1

I think an honest assessment of this question points to overwhelming weakness. Even government social democrats became neoliberals – Blair Schroedder – in the 1990s and there is little sign yet of reconstruction to the left. There is a huge political vacuum which is very dangerous on the back of the huge meltdown of capitalism we now confront. The political initiative may well come from the right with an especially vicious revanchism. On the question of strengths, and with an eye entirely on the US which I know better than Europe, I would say that perversely, the irrelevance of the left has allowed many socialist and marxist ideas to stay alive. Unlike in Europe, where socialist ideas are quite closely tied to official political parties and therefore have been dragged to the right – I am best aware of the British/Labour Party experience – in North America the minuscule socialist presence has stayed alive in academia as well as in a few more radical unions (cf. longshore workers). If their influence is negligible, at least there is a clearer sense of socialist versus capitalist ideas and very little neoliberalization of social democracy. Today's trenchant capitalist crisis provides significant opportunities as even the capitalist class is having to rethink what capitalism is and what it means, but we start virtually from zero.

Question 2

The biggest contradiction is that nominally socialist parties – UK, Germany, e.g. – were central accelerators toward capitalist crisis, to their own remorse, and that these parties, broadly, remain committed to bailing out capitalism. Luxemburg's "revolutionary Realpolitik" makes eminent sense when there is a powerful revolutionary movement, as in her period, that can force its will politically or at least aspire to do so. That is not the situation today. There is no revolutionary movement in Europe or North America and the idea of a "revolutionary Realpolitik" is an empty slogan that can camouflage a social democratic partnership with capital – again, UK Labour Party and SPD. In such a position of weakness, the appeal to a broad coalition with "civil society movements"

is important, but a socialist critique has to be maintained throughout this process. How does social class parse these movements?

Question 3

For me, reform demands are exactly the wrong way to go. It is certainly very important to push for reforms but from a position of political strength. Without the political strength of a powerful socialist movement, demands for reform will be mulched into merely liberal sentiment. The central question, therefore becomes not reform demands, per se, but building political power. Reform demands are part of that galvanizing process, to be sure, but they are in the first place (but not in the last) a means not an end. Today's demands are a means to build the power to make more radical demands possible, and this in turn makes more radical social transformation plausible. Now more than ever is the time to put revolutionary ideas back on the agenda. Why, as Žižek has put it, are we more able to imagine the catastrophic nuclear end of the world than we can imagine the end of an obviously momentary capitalism? How has our political imagination been so dramatically shut down and what can be done to revive it? Today, with people totally pissed off at what capitalism has wrought, we need to be raising those kinds of questions. The specifics of a programme are therefore quite contingent, place to place and moment to moment, and less important for me than concretizing the transformative ambition.

Question 4

The most difficult question, obviously. The level of sharp popular political anger is greater than at any time in the last few decades. In that sense people on the ground – losing homes, jobs, pensions, bank accounts – are often ahead of us. What we have is a sense of the connectedness of these different struggles both across issues and across regions and a sense of causes. We need to make critiques and demands that galvanize these discontents into a broader analysis, not necessarily by establishing some fixed programme. More than anything the left, with many of us a bit divorced from the lives of many working class people, needs to reconnect. Whether this means work with unions or anti-gentrification movements, environmental activists, budding unemployed movements, or the remnants of the anti-war movement, and many others, there is no substitute for this building from the bottom up. It's not a new predicament but it is increasingly urgent.

Ingar Solty

The current global financial crisis and impending global recession appears to be a “big crisis” of the neoliberally regulated finance driven accumulation regime. The problem that the left faces in the Northern core capitalist countries is an asynchronic development. The hegemonic crisis of neoliberalism is progressing at an enormous speed while the counter-hegemonic forces – where they have advanced – lags behind the current process of the unraveling of neoliberal hegemony, and they have problems keeping pace. While state leaders in the US and in Europe are muddling through the crisis, throwing ideology overboard and professing a trial-and-error policy resembling the trial-and-error processes of state leaders during the terminal crisis of Keynesian Fordism, left forces need to get a foot in the door to impact the sea change in the social structures of accumulation which currently appears to be taking place. Some form of neo-neo- or post-neoliberalism is likely to be the result of the current crisis and the specific nature of this new mode of regulation of high-tech capitalism will have crucial implications for any left strategy.

The strengths of the left in the northern core capitalist countries lie in the rehabilitation of political strategies of the left and the immediate political sphere. To have achieved this – in Germany through the far-reaching appreciation or at least acceptance - felt in the deepest levels of the social movements - of the Left Party’s successes - and in the US through the important political strategy debate which was the leading theme at the Left Forum 2006 in New York – is an important step towards left successes in the current conjuncture. Connected to this is another strength which has to do with the recognition that there is not going to be any major social progress if the labor movement is bypassed. And yet, the labor movement is in crisis. Hence, there is an urgent need for a revitalization of labor, as in the US the Change to Win Coalition originally demanded. Political lobbying is not a strategy. It is a tool in a toolbox – and incidentally not the best one. The neoliberal transformation of European social democracies and the US’s quasi social democracy has proved to be devastating to the labor movements in the Northern core capitalist countries. The contradictions of neoliberalism has often met with right-wing political articulations throughout the Northern core capitalist countries as an almost natural byproduct of

neoliberal socio-economic transformation. The racialized distribution struggles at the bottom of society resulting from the transition from macroeconomic full employment policies towards currency value stability, the neoliberal deindustrialization and the resulting unmaking of class through de-unionization, the hegemonic absorption and (self-)inscription of the left opposition from 1968 into neoliberalism and the resulting vacuum on the left, the neoliberal transformation of gradualist social democracy combined with the demise of Western communist parties after 1989 – all these processes have led to the emergence of a growing disconnected, declassed mass population which has formed the basis for modern right-wing populism either as independent party formations in proportional representation voting systems or as mobilized party wings in majority voting systems such as the US. And even in Germany, the only major capitalist country with no national right-wing populist party on a national scale, modern right-wing populism is still the biggest enemy of socialist-postneoliberalism strategies. And given that right-wing populism thrives where neoliberal precarization and declassing and neoliberal class fragmentation meet, overcoming this class fragmentation on an durable basis is one of the central tasks of a left strategy today.

Hence, a strategy for labor is essential and it has to include strengthening the workplace bargaining power of labor through increased unionization efforts. The SEIU's success – regardless of how controversial and ambivalent it is in terms of neutrality agreements – is a step in the right direction. The bloodletting of labor needs to be stopped and the current discussion about viable labor strategies in the US – transnational labor mobilization (Bronfenbrenner), a Southern Strategy of labor with a specific focus on strategically important segments of the labor market, some of which have actually been strengthened by neoliberal just-in-time production (Moody/Beverly Silver), a major unionization effort combined with a political strategy regenerating labor as a publicly visible political force (Aronowitz) – is an important step towards deciding what can be achieved in a mid-term perspective with the limited resources available.

At the same time, a grass-roots strategy of labor is not enough. Although Gramsci understood that (counter-)hegemony needs to be constructed and emanates from the bottom-up, from the social relations of production, he was also aware of the need for moral and intellectual leadership. In the context of disintegrating public forums of labor, particularly in the US (South), the political sphere is an important level of initiating social movements and discourses about alternatives. The

German example shows how the interaction and mutual strengthening of labor movement and political party leads to positive results for all participating elements if both – social movements and party – are aware of the contradictions of entering the political field and live up to mastering the difficulties of such moves. Such an immediately political strategy of the Left entails, in the case of the US, posing the entrism/Third Party debate (G. William Domhoff vs. Rick Wolff with Stanley Aronowitz somewhere in between) and developing from that necessary debate viable political strategies of the left. The desire to form new independent parties – not in the important, enlarged understanding of the 19th but in the immediate institutional understanding of the 20th century – is understandable when observing the centralization of power within the Democratic Party during the ascent of the Democratic Leadership Council ever since the mid-1980s, the experiences with the Clinton Democrats and the economic policy centrism of the Obama project. However, desire and viability can be two different things. Hence, the question must be scrutinized why – especially in the current context of the weakness of American labor – an independent new party of (labor and) the left would not also end up in the cemetery of third party formations.

In Europe, the experience with the demise of the left formations outside of Germany, the Netherlands and also Greece and Norway – most drastically in Italy with the defeat of the Rainbow Coalition, the split of Respect! UK and the unexpected reorganization of neoliberal hegemony in Sarkozy France partly due to the weakness of the left – are proof of the difficulty of successful political strategies. One of the central issues here seems to me the maintenance of credibility. Besides Italy, in Norway left parties have had their first experiences with left party government participation which initially were made to happen by innovative labor strategies. In Germany, the government participations of the former PDS show a clear pattern of the difficulty of combining government participations and the maintenance of credibility. The PDS's Eastern ascent from originally around 10% of the popular vote right after the 1989 Wende to today between 25% or 30% (making it the strongest party in the East in a number of recent polls) was – with the exception of one state election – based on approximately 5% increases through every election cycle. These gains were only halted and reversed, suddenly resulting in devastating defeats, when the PDS entered into coalitions with the SPD or tolerated SPD minority governments (a much rarer situation in Germany than in other countries). This shows that there is a fundamental contradiction

between government participations and electoral/popular success and credibility. Credibility, however, can be maintained if, as a result of a debate about this problem, strictly antineoliberal minimum criteria for government participations can be developed including, for example, the negation of privatizations and the assessment whether under the current state financial conditions tangible improvements for the working classes can be achieved. The difficulty of such criteria, which are developed in order to maintain credibility, are seen, of course, particularly in the Italian case where left party government participations were justified on the basis of averting right-wing governments with or without Berlusconi. Still, these issues need to be debated.

The question of credibility, however, also has to do with another important issue which needs to be addressed: namely that polls or election results are important but are not the only and not even the most decisive indicators of political success. Having realized the need for left political party strategy, one must also not forget why the single-issue movements' critique of party politics emerged in the first place. A successful political strategy today can only be based on a "party of a new type". This phrase is easier uttered than filled with content. One important notion of such a party, however, appears to me to be the construction of any new political formation in the Northern core capitalist countries as a class project with hegemonic outreach to the productive bloc in society (which today must embrace and win over workers with "subjectively contradictory class positions" and immense discursive influence such as the IT and communication workers).¹² Election results and consequential institutional power are important, but a successful strategy cannot rely on short-term mobilizations of passive sentiments but has to be measured by its success in terms of a long-term organization of strategically important and socially powerful agents of change, i.e. the unmaking of the unmaking of class which amounts to a remaking of class not only from below but also from above. This includes reaching out to and strengthening ties with existing organizations and institutions, including labor unions, social policy leagues (Wohlfahrtsverbände), churches etc. However, this also includes addressing the question of education and of the approaching termination of an interregnum in which Marxism was institutionalized

¹² Here a debate on the problems of the proposal for guaranteed basic income, as opposed to a full-employment approach (despite all the latter's ecological and practical problems associated with the latter, is absolutely essential.)

within the ideological state apparatuses - the universities. These remain important arenas of struggle and must not be dismissed or given up lightly. However, the internal problem of a split between theory and praxis in the universities as well as its [Marxism's] accelerated disappearance from the universities needs to be challenged by a development of internal party capacities of education. Of course, a Parteihochschule [party school] cannot be expected from any of the existing left parties including the German Die LINKE, but institutions such as the Rosa Luxemburg Stiftung need to become more aware of the task at hand – i.e. not only financing left education, but also generating it systematically with institutional clout. The partly education-based construction of long-term party affiliations and consciousness – and the DIW (German Institute for Economic Research) study on the Left Party is quite instructive in this respect and makes me hopeful – does not, however, only fulfill the purpose of mass education, but this mass education is important in order to make people capable of defending a left political project against the forces of reaction. This has to do with a general trend towards more authoritarian and coercive forms of rule within capitalism. The debate launched by the Bild Zeitung about whether “Lafontaine was making Germany ungovernable”, pushing for a transition towards a first-past-the-post voting system which was picked up by former president Roman Herzog, a right-wing conservative disciple of the Nazi legal theorist Theodor Maunz,¹³ was in this respect a point in case. A long-term oriented class formation process is necessary in order to be able in the future to call upon an organized mass base which understands such moves as what they are: political moves against their own interests at a seemingly remote level. This affords a lot of class consciousness, and this consciousness must be the goal of left politics today. In the case of the Herzog debate, it was only due to the more compromise-oriented factions of the German ruling class as well as the institutional interests of the other small parties that major public-sphere figures and “second hand dealers in ideology”, such as the (economically right-wing) social democrat, Franz Walter, came out immediately on behalf of the Left Party, although they are far from feeling sympathy for it. If they had not cut off the ungovernability debate, who knows where this could have led? The

¹³ The irony of this move is striking: promoting competition economically but attempting to eliminate competition in the political sphere right at the time in which cross-class parties lose their grip on society and small grand-coalitions become the rule rather than the exception in neoliberalism.

main point, however, is that the German bourgeoisie has been shocked by the sudden rise of the Left Party and the bourgeois perception that all other parties have technically been steered by the Left Party ever since may be overdrawn, but there is a truth at its core. The forces of reaction will react and when they do, Die LINKE and other left parties will have to be ready to defend themselves through an organized mass base.

In other words, the kind of left populism professed by the Dutch Socialist Party is not enough. There has been sufficient experience with this kind of short-term orientation of left parties. To be hegemonically effective, left parties need to become arenas of public debate and of a reactivation of political potentials. This is not only important in terms of the democratic character of any future socialist formation; it also has crucial implications for the social groups and classes that a left party needs to win over. What needs to be addressed is a debate that is taking place or should take place within the German Left Party and is the result of the practical differences between the Eastern and Western left, namely whether socialism can ultimately be achieved based on a guaranteed basic income, which depends on the development of capital accumulation and the distributional sphere and its conjunctures and does not empower workers, or whether the orientation towards full employment – despite all its ecological and practical problems – is not the only way of reshifting the power between capital and labor and ultimately overcoming capitalism.

Christoph Spehr

Question 1

The common weakness of both the European and the American left is its lack of vision. We simply could not tell what we would do if people would trust us and give the left real political power – which is one serious reason why people don't. Where do we want to go: a renewed Socialism? Old Socialism but with more political liberty? Capitalism with strong regulations? Where are we heading? 20 years after the fall of State Socialism, the question is open: what now? And there is still no answer!

I do not think that there should be a unified vision of an alternative society, a vision that is a complete blueprint and part of a party program. But to become hegemonic, the left has to develop a sound debate which society and which economy it stands for. At present, we like to concentrate on easy targets like what is bad in Neoliberalism. Well, almost everybody knows now that Neoliberalism has its failures and cruelties. What is needed are answers to the question: with what do we want to replace it?

Answers to this question are, at the moment, not serious. We talk about Solidarity Economy, but we cannot define it, and we do not really discuss what this means for a global economy and its forces of production. We have no real answer what kind of planned economy and what kind of social control of economy we want. We have no real answer how to avoid both dangers: that of capital power and that of state oppression. 30 years after the rise and victory of Neoliberal Capitalism, we still do not take it seriously: what did it really do? In which way was it an answer to the change of the mode of production? How is the way we work, live and produce changing today, and why is Socialism (or whatever?) the best answer?

The strength of the European left is its popularity. The European left, as it developed in the last 10 years, is really able to take up issues that move people: wages, labor rights, social benefits, social rights. It is really connected to the emerging groups of poor, unemployed, marginalized, underpaid people. This is always linked to the danger of populism, of losing connection to the political left, of becoming just another

social democratic party. But the new quality of the organized left in Europe is the strong political connection to the actual underclass.

The strength of the American left is that it is much more rooted in diversity. It is more modern and it is less likely to forget that women, ethnic groups, gays and lesbians have to be addressed and organized as a central part of any new left. Affirmative action, however under siege now, has a tradition among the American left. It does not have a tradition among the European left. The American left is closer to the ambiguity of modern Capitalism that gives capital an unknown, fatal power that really dissolves old social hierarchies, rebuilds society in ways that cannot be turned back. In Europe, especially in Germany, there is a strong feeling of nostalgia, of getting back the social systems and the society of the 60s and 70s. But a modern left cannot simply go back because there are good reasons why society before Neoliberalism cannot be a utopia for us.

Strengthening the left will occur if the left addresses both target groups that it needs: The people that are really under attack by Neoliberalism, the poor, the working poor, the non-privileged workers etc. – and the people who want a left alternative to Capitalism, patriarchy, ethnocentrism, dominance etc. If you lose one of both groups, you'll lose.

Question 2

It is impossible to decide how to deal with social democracy. We simply do not know what will happen.

There are two options, of course. One is that social democracy will be renewed, that social democracy will get rid of its compliance with Neoliberalism, that the left will regain a kind of hegemony inside social democracy. Then social democracy is a needed partner for any real change. The other option is that this will not happen, that social democracy will stick to Neoliberalism and will shrink, becoming a rather small party. In this case, other forces will rise, in addition to the actual left parties, and they will become partners in a common effort where the left has to be the centre of this coalition, and become much stronger than today.

We have to prepare for both options. At the moment, people hope to change social democracy, but social democracy is heavily resisting and refusing. The bottom line for the left is that it has to support any political constellation that really improves the social situation of the poor, of workers, of marginalized groups. It cannot support any constellation that is likely to further undermine the rights and the income of the underclass. This is it. Strategies to support a centrist-left coalition that

stops the right but does not improve living conditions for the workers and those on social benefits, have failed.

It is necessary that the left develops programmatic answers to how an improvement of the economic and social situation of the oppressed could be implemented. The left has to develop "projects" of transformation that are sound, practical and, in the end, become popular. This will be the core of any bargaining with centrist social democracy. The question of power has to be stripped of its moral aspects ("must we, may we") and be based on a number of projects that are needed, with or without left-centrist cooperation.

Question 3

A renewed right of labor and income. Ending the system of mass unemployment, intensified exploitation and unregulated overwork, substituting a system that enables the state to regulate working conditions, create publicly financed employment and impose social standards for all kind of work.

A renewed system of social security, with fair access to health, education and social integration for everybody. This needs a strong improvement of public finance by a tax system that makes companies pay.

An active policy of strategic nationalization. Public ownership and part-ownership has to be developed as a way of economic control. This may take up parts of the strategy of Labour in Great Britain in the 70s: National plans, a set of public-owned companies (at least one in every important economic sector) to set standards, to control prices etc.

A new international system of social control of big companies, some kind of Anti-MAI. This is not just talking about standards etc., this is about how state and society need to become legally part of big companies' boards, decisions, ownership to get actual influence.

Question 4

The target would be to develop common political projects for change that are radical, practical and sound, e.g. for the programmatic headings listed in (3). This could be brought forward by a set of thematic conferences, focusing on one major project, analyzing the situation and examples of alternatives, and setting up models.

The other instrument should be to set up a sound, ongoing debate on what has to follow Neoliberalism (and Capitalism) in our perspective. Is there a new. Modern Socialism? Can we describe it? What is the differ-

ence? What is its economy? This could be done by mutually exchanged contributions for magazines, combined with small workshops.

William K. Tabb

Question 1

The problems or crises of contemporary capitalism are, I think, well understood (see my essay in the October 2008 issue of *Monthly Review* <http://monthlyreview.org/081006tabb.php> and my Will Miller Lecture <http://www.monthlyreview.org/mrzine/tabb101008.html> for my own take on them). The division between the interests of transnational capitals and international financial institutions domiciled in particular social formations (the U.S., Germany etc.) undermines any hope of social partnership which sustained social democracy. In the U.S., stagnant real working-class incomes, growing insecurity, and, generally, the diminution of the social wage from health care to retirement has increased working-class fears and resentments which are currently trained in a host of misdirections. Consciousness has not led to a rejection of the two parties, and reformism still has appeal although less so than before. The winner-take-all nature of the electoral system insures that votes for left third parties strengthen the right's chances of victory and so is a great inhibitor of independent political activity. While US imperialism suffers major setbacks in Iraq and Afghanistan, this is not reflected in the strength of the anti-war movement since opposition to our troops fighting and dying is deemed unpatriotic.

The objective conditions for a revival of the American Left are evident. The subjective ones are not, although the overlap of the systemic analyses of the diverse movements, anti-racist, feminist, ecological etc. are converging and involve critique of the system as a whole to a much greater extent than before, even if too much of this is targeted at Bush and Company and not the system itself. Co-optation into the Obama campaign is understandable. If he wins, the disillusion will be extensive and it is a question of what the Left can do with it. For the first time in a long time many of the brightest young people are engaged in politics, but there is little connection with the socialist left which is viewed as having been a failure. As a result much of this idealism is tempered with a residual cynicism with regard to fundamental social change and an inclination toward reformist politics. More radical action is found in the diversity of social movements who make their presence felt at the local level in many places where they are capable of pushing back. At this

stage they offer a moral critique; however, they need to develop a class critique of why the problems people face exist and are worsening. This is not supported by a left culture capable of talking to them in meaningful terms. This larger ideological task must precede any effort at engaging in the political arena in any serious way.

American imperialism becomes a central issue in new ways. First is the domestic costs of the imperial project which is borne by ordinary citizens, many of whom have seen through the lies of the Bush administration but reject the Left's "hatred of America" and are torn between ingrained patriotism and a clear-eyed view of what it means to spread American values through "shock and awe" and torture of prisoners. They are ready for a nicer, multilateral imperialism to make America safe. Yet the traditional knee-jerk patriotism is checked for many by awareness that there is a larger and larger coalition of the unwilling who have lost respect for their country's policies in the world. The Left needs to explain what imperialism is in ways which do not appear un-American, by affirming basic American values of justice and fairness. The Left is not good at this nor willing in many instances to take such a position since it is easily coopted. The rise of China and other emerging economies will objectively limit American hegemonic aspirations in coming years and enforce greater realism but does not answer the question of what kind of world the "another-world-is-possible" ought to be. The radical Left is better at opposing than entering such a conversation. It is used to being principled at the expense of seeking to be effective.

Questions 2 and 3

are not distinct from my perspective and geographical location. The decline in the ability of capitalism in core countries to meet the needs of the working class, and, once elected, the calls of left-center parties for further concessions, opens space for non-reformist reform demands aimed at attacking class privilege and power in the areas of decommodification and social regulation of capital. This involves making connections and getting people to think in terms of the totality and the logic of capitalism which stands in the way of a better life. In the United States health care is a crisis not only for the uninsured but the under-insured. It is a cost crisis because the current system which favors private insurance over public provision not only leads to a conflict in interest between companies wishing to deny treatment or pay for preventative care but also leads to wider contradictions between the processed-food and fast-food industries which fatten Americans and causes health problems and premature deaths. Alternatives would have to confront each of

these aspects - from the insurers and their political enablers to the American diet. In each area non-reformist reforms would attach a pillar of capitalist profit making and in a transitional set of demands require not just good intentions but awareness of the difficulties involved to enforce social controls. The problem is putting forward popularized versions of what are to some extent complex programmatic proposals.

On the level of existing finance-driven high-tech capitalism the Left needs to demand a serious shrinking of that part of the financial system built on high leverage for speculative purposes. Gamblers need to put in their own money and cover their bets. The huge bailouts are necessary because the investors could not stand behind these speculative plays when the cycle turned as it always does. The problem will be worse in the next financial crisis because there will then be fewer larger financial institutions, and they will be more global than they currently are; they will simply be too large to save. There can be no insurance of losses without strict regulation and disclosure. The problem is that in an expansion these safeguards go by the board unless active monitoring and pressure on the capitalist state is maintained. This is politically difficult, but in the crisis period making clear the extent not simply of abuse but of the cooperation between elected officials and capital, and the costs to the people, can be done in ways which reinforce what people already know at some level. The conflict between the private measurement of costs and benefits and the proper evaluation of social costs and benefits needs to be made explicit in such areas as energy policy and the environment more broadly. Global capitalism requires global-scale regulation of labor and environmental standards. The Left needs to develop ways to talk about full real-cost pricing as including industrial-process environment costs, end-use wastes and recycling packaging and "spent" products. Capital's profit logic needs to be replaced step by step by convincing people of what the real costs of its dominance are and demanding provisioning of the social good and a sustainable economy in which all workers are paid a living wage with social protections. International standards need to be negotiated through alliance of trade unions and other movements for social justice globally.

Production for use is more easily grasped. It is not that the government cannot afford to do what people want; it is that the corporations and wealthy avoid paying the taxes they once did. New approaches to taxation, e.g. global-level taxation of the corporations and the wealthy who now avoid taxation and are bankrupting states - and further essential demands are the distribution of proceeds on a set of criteria which include a combination of where value added is created, where profits are realized and an equity-sharing based on redistributive justice. The wider

point is that there are technical answers to the questions facing us. The problems are at the level of politics. People must see there are solutions which come from controlling capital and from democratic decision-making but that achieving desired outcomes is a matter of class struggle and, importantly, class self-education and development of analytic capacities which can see beyond the propaganda spin they are fed daily in such large quantity.

Question 4

The US Left could benefit from examples of how in different European countries working-class formations, unions and political parties have achieved higher living standards (and how US policies of deregulation and unwillingness to cooperate on matters such as taxation treaties undermine progressive efforts elsewhere). It is useful to understand the ways in which the United States government operates in the world has undercut democratic progress, and the role of this government in undermining and destroying progressive movements and policies of international cooperation need to be highlighted. We also need to understand the causes of the failure of the Social Europe project. The analysis of the failures of a social democracy many in America aspire to emulate is important. Discussion of mechanisms of control, the vulnerability of working-class individuals to right-wing party appeals and how these have been successfully (and not successfully) answered would be useful. A serious discussion of the reconfiguration of world capitalism (including the rise of the economies of the semi-periphery) is needed in talking about alternative globalizations.

Rick Wolff

Question 1

As global markets spread the burst US credit bubble, a broadening US economic downturn overflows onto Europe, Asia, Latin America, and Africa. Mass critical attention returns to the economy and its leaders, both private and governmental. Having taken credit for the “boom” from the 1980s to 2007, those leaders now face blame for economic decline. Inadequate state regulation, corrupted by big business, is widely attacked. Dangerously risky speculation, predatory lending and fraud are now recognized as widespread in the mortgage brokerage, banking, securitization, and credit rating industries. The stock markets’ failures to reflect, anticipate or “price in” the real risks of investments are now splitting neoliberal capitalism. Desperate bankers lead a sizeable portion of *former* neoliberals in organizing ever more and increasingly intrusive government interventions in the private economy (e.g., Bear Stearns, Fannie Mae, Freddie Mac, Lehman Brothers). The interventions shift the risks and costs of cleaning up the current economic mess onto the public sector. As the government socializes the risks and costs, its careful intervention keeps profits private. The remaining neoliberals, repeating their dogma with diminishing confidence, try to limit the increased government economic intervention so that neoliberal ideology is not totally discredited.

The reformist lefts in Europe and North America became so subservient to neoliberal ideology and policies over recent decades that many seem unable to mount any serious political response or alternative to the economic disasters proliferating around them. Many support that part of the business community that now leads state economic intervention as if that were the “reform we all need.” Other parts of the reformist lefts use capitalism’s current decline to repeat old arguments and demands for welfare state interventionism borrowed from the US New Deal and traditional European social democracy. They seek to renew classic social democracy as the necessary *and only* alternative to neoliberalism’s collapse. These two reformist wings are struggling.

The more radical, anti-capitalist left also divided into two parts. One shrank into increasingly frustrated, often sectarian political marginality: it repeated the classic variants of communist positions (e.g. in-

stead of mere government regulation and control, the government should take ownership of industrial enterprises). The shrinkage accelerated over the last quarter century as those old communist positions were abandoned in the former “actually existing socialisms.” The other part of the more radical left dissolved and reassembled itself as more or less mass-based, single-issue “social movements”. In so far as the social movements criticized globalized neoliberal capitalism at all, they too repeated classical social democratic demands and programs.

No new formulation of a distinctively anti-capitalist analysis or program emerged from either part of the radical left. This reinforced in many the belief that nothing further left than more or less classical social democracy was conceivable just as an ascendant neoliberal capitalism seemed to render classical social democracy unattractive and unnecessary. So the seriously anti-capitalist left became more politically marginalized and limited to small political sects and various academic groups.

What strength remains in the reformist left is based on mass resistance to further erosion of workers’ social supports and wage standards and now the growing anger and resentment against a declining economic situation that threatens jobs and debt-based consumption levels. More than ever before, left reformism now depends on the belief that the only political alternative to a now-discredited neoliberalism is a return to old social democracy.

In contrast, a renewal of the radical, anti-capitalist left depends on whether it can achieve two interconnected goals: (1) to persuasively explain why social democracy – in both its US and European forms - *failed* to preserve, let alone advance, workers’ gains won in the last global capitalist breakdown and therefore why another social democratic program is an inadequate response to neoliberalism’s current crisis, and (2) to articulate a new program that responds to neoliberal capitalism’s crisis without repeating social democracy’s flaws and failures. Such a renewal of a radical, anti-capitalist left will tap the accumulated worker resentment against social democratic parties in Europe and the Democratic Party in the US.

The major opportunity now for the radical, anti-capitalist left emerges as neoliberal capitalism’s crisis dissolves the post 1989 ideological hegemony of capitalist triumphalism. Both reformist and radical, anti-capitalist lefts face growing audiences and adherents. However, the US and European reformist lefts are burdened by their failures, in and out of power, when neoliberal capitalism counterattacked after the 1970s and especially after 1989.

The neoliberal counterattack constrained, reduced, or eliminated state programs protecting or supporting workers' wages, working conditions, levels of consumption, etc. Neoliberal ideologies (individualism, laissez-faireism, celebrations of market efficiency, etc.) more or less replaced social democratic ideologies (socialism, solidarity, state – interventionism, etc.). Social democracy failed across the social landscape and its leaders and organizations often became more or less complicit with neoliberalism. These facts pose major problems for reformist left efforts to revive its organizations and political power. Reformism does benefit from neoliberal ideological hegemony because it repressed the notion of any alternative to capitalism in favor of the view that politics only disputes which kind of capitalism to endorse (more or less private vs state-interventionist).

The radical, anti-capitalist left therefore has the *negative* task to expose and attack social democratic failures to protect or advance workers' rights, wage gains, social supports, etc. The radical, anti-capitalist's *positive* task is to promote a genuinely new alternative program more likely to secure and advance workers' interests against the costly risks of an inherently unstable capitalism.

Question 2

Today's chief tasks for a left committed to revolutionary real-politik are (1) to disseminate a persuasive critique of capitalism in both its neoliberal and welfare statist forms (emphasizing now that capitalism is the system that caused and is now in global crisis), (2) integrate that critique as a central feature of a broader campaign for socialist ideological hegemony, (3) gather its committed militants into an effective political organization, and (4) gather its supporters into voting blocs. Only on the basis of success in these tasks will such a left be desired for and respected within political alliances with center-lefts and social democrats with reformist goals. Only on the basis of success in these tasks will such a left be able to ally with single-issue and civil-society social movements on the basis of our respecting their goals and they respecting our anti-capitalism in a shared social/political agenda.

Question 3

The new program of a radical, anti-capitalist left revival has two parts as follows:

Part 1. Our left critique of social democracy

1. Social democratic regimes in the US and Europe failed to end the internal class division of most enterprises. This left in place the productive laborers or producers of surplus (or profits) on one side and, on the other side, the appropriators of that surplus (or profits). When industrial enterprises remained private under social democratic regimes, the appropriators were typically boards of directors elected by shareholders. If and when industrial enterprises became state-owned and state-operated, rather than private, the appropriators were most typically state officials. *In both cases, the class division between producers and appropriators of the surplus/profits inside enterprises was preserved.*
2. In both cases, surplus appropriators *had concrete material interests* in evading and/or overturning the typical social democratic regulations and controls on their freedom of economic action and decision. Enterprise objectives of economic growth, product diversification, victory in competition with other enterprises, increasing management remuneration or dividend payouts or share prices, etc. prodded surplus appropriators to undermine social democracy where and when it was established.
3. Surplus appropriators *had the means* to evade and/or overturn the typical social democratic regulations and controls on their activities. *As the social group into whose hands the surplus flowed first and who performed the actual social distribution of the surplus, the surplus appropriators could and eventually did use those surpluses to evade and/or undermine social democracy.*
4. Before 1980, US private capitalists used their surpluses to evade New Deal controls and regulations. Political conditions then did not yet allow direct assaults on the welfare state. Since 1980, US capitalists used their surpluses to eliminate or reduce the welfare state in favor of corporate growth and profitability.
5. European social democracy has likewise been seriously reduced and weakened by the deployment of private corporate surpluses to those ends. They helped to induce social democratic parties to adopt much neoliberal ideology and enact neoliberal "reforms." Those parties slowed neoliberalism's advance – in the hope of retaining political support – but their complicity with neoliberal agendas is now widely recognized.
6. Conclusion: Leaving surplus appropriation and distribution in the hands of small groups of people rather than the productive workers themselves structures a class difference at the heart of social production. Social democracy or welfare state programs usually benefit workers while limiting, regulating, and controlling the appropria-

tors/distributors of surpluses. The latter sooner or later use the surpluses to reduce or destroy social democracy or welfare states. Thus, to leave in place the internal enterprise class division between producers and appropriators of the surplus provides social democracy's enemies with the means as well as the incentives for social democracy's defeat.

Part 2: Our new left program:

1. A renewed radical left must affirm a basic anti-capitalism defined in a new way: we stand for the democratic transformation of all enterprises such that the workers within them become their own collective boards of directors. That is, we advocate abolition of the division between the masses who produce the surpluses and the tiny minority who appropriate and distribute those surpluses.
2. This demand distinguishes us from most past radical lefts – that did not make that demand central to their programs (whether in or out of state power). This demand also distinguishes us from the other left movements today. It is thus the distinctive demand we propose for inclusion in a broad left social and political agenda.
3. Many traditional demands of the left (e.g. socialized/state provision of universal health care, subsidized housing and transport; society-wide economic and ecological planning, real political democracy and equality, etc.) are perfectly compatible with our demand to transform the surplus organization of production. Indeed, the transformation we seek is crucial to realize those traditional demands of the social democratic left and the social movements (and hence a basis for our alliance with them).
4. Concrete models exist for our proposed democratic transformation of enterprises. For example, for decades in California's Silicon Valley many software enterprises are born when engineers quit huge capitalist firms to establish new, radically different enterprises. In them, all engineers work from Monday through Thursday producing software programs that the enterprise sells. On Fridays all decide collectively (one engineer, one vote) what portion enterprise revenues to distribute as their individual incomes and what portion – the surplus – to distribute socially (in taxes to the state, funds for enterprise expansion, etc.). Such enterprises' engineers rejected capitalist organizations of production in favor of radically democratic alternative organizations of the sort we advocate. With political power, a new radical left could secure the social supports to generalize the engineers' model for all of society's enterprises.

5. Thus, our new program calls upon the mass of workers to become directly involved in (a) movements now to transform capitalist society – by advocating and organizing to refuse their labor when it produces surplus for others, and (b) in the ongoing movement to reorganize the economy into enterprises in which those who produce and those who appropriate/distribute the surplus are the same people.

Question 4

The best way for the radical lefts in each region to help each other is to communicate their experiences, both failures and successes, in the context of an ongoing, systematic, and organized series of in-person exchanges. These should focus, sequentially, on (1) alternative theories and analyses, (2) actual political programs, and (3) concrete practices of one or both regions' radical lefts. Between these exchanges, organized, on-going debates need to be electronically circulated with summaries of such debates since the last in-person exchange providing preparatory documents for each subsequent in-person exchange. The point is to organize an on-going trans-Atlantic radical left dialogue and collaboration.

Bios

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