

Let us quote from our starting working paper: “The central challenge is and will be to work on strategies against competition, for organizing solidarity. Here we have to recognize that we were and are not successful regardless all Social Forum Processes, many conferences, workshops and so many activities. It means, we have to ask about the reasons of our failures.”

This point was criticized for being destructive. We were told that we had to support the alternative forces and would rather frustrate them.

We don't agree for two reasons: The social, ecological and global problems are dramatic and even rising. We have to deal with them responsibly. The left belongs to the society which produces and still increases these problems –and therefore the needs (and the suffering) of people, above all of the socially weakest and of the children. If we really want to help the suffering and to change society we have to start with changing ourselves.

This is why we have to start (or to continue) discussing and analyzing our failures. Who does not want to do this will not be able to understand why society works as it works. Consequently, she or he will be unable to develop strategies for overcoming one's own weakness in contributing to just and therefore sustainable solutions of problems. Why believe in somebody who does not speak about own responsibilities for the problems? Or in case of somebody young: How to believe in an ability to make it better than the others have made it, without considering and analyzing the results of those others? Or – maybe much more important – how can we develop our own identity and, accordingly, the abilities to convince and to act without any continuous reflection about ourselves and about what we are doing?

It all boils down to the statement that we do especially see the following reason for our own weakness: We don't take us the time and the room to discuss about our own experiences in connection with a really deep analysis of society. So we use the terms from the mainstream science, policy and media and try to be and become better than today and better than the others – without trying to be different. More specifically: When we say “policy” we refer to the state, to government, and to parties, but not to the practically oriented critique of existing power relations between socially and societally different groups of people. We do call more or less successfully upon people to participate in demonstrations and in elections, but we do not activate their own understanding and thinking within their daily life. We do not live a culture of creating alternative ways of thinking, of behaviour and of acting. We do not start from a historical and theoretical understanding of society and of societal change. But trying to really improve society we should have to change our own way of life and to really and effectively oppose all that which prevents us from living in self-determination, solidarity, and ecological responsibility.

Often we begin by criticizing the others, and to conclude that she or he and their own organization are better than the other ones ... But determining the own role at first in relation to the other expresses an overestimation of tactics and an underestimation strategy, i.e. of the understanding the very structures of society which have to be overcome, as well as an underestimation of our own values, positions, programs and strategies. Such an approach will often turn out to be disturbing – for really seeing

one's own role in a globalized world, in building solidarity, in searching for effective possibilities to act.

One of the main failures of the left, has been and still is, the tendency to determine one's own identity not from the values, the experience, the education defining our identity as a force of liberation, making use of the philosophies of modern dialectics and modern materialism, which would contribute to defining a strategy of liberation, but exclusively from reflections on and of power relations, which can only provide the foundations for a tactics of political survival. This is the reason, why the majority of the left are afraid contradictions do not regard them as possibilities to reflect, to deliberate, and to act. On the left, there is no culture of self-education, of self-organisation, based upon a common search for strategically effective possibilities to act and for building alliances and spaces for common reflection, deliberation, and the development of strategies..

This attempt at problem analysis is motivated by the concern of coming to grips with the prevailing conditions, as they do effectively present themselves – i.e. with our practice in everyday social life: first and foremost, this will mean actively organizing solidarity with the socially and globally weakest and the most vulnerable, but not in a charitable vein, but in a strategic perspective, of really bringing the counter-powers into play which we can activate on our side. This concern is a moral imperative, and at the same time, a central criterion for socialist politics – particularly in view of the continuing situation of political defensive in which the left finds itself. The cumulative experience of the left has shown that it makes more sense to focus on common processes of searching and deliberating, rather than unilaterally presenting complete and closed conceptions. Such search processes will include the organization of specific concrete projects and their support in solidarity, with the goal of mitigating or solving specific problems in everyday life, individually and collectively, starting there, where we effectively stand – in the fragmented, but powerful realm of Europeanized politics.

The central strategic idea is thus to both strengthen and further develop European left politics – relying on shared historical experiences and present engagement with existing realities, while – at the same time – taking full responsibility for global trends and processes.

In looking for possibilities of political action within existing societal contradictions, and in analyzing and discussing them, we have so far identified four main political areas of action which are already, at least potentially, interconnected in significant ways:

- (1) The maintenance and restoration of peaceful relations within states, and between states, as well as groups of states;
- (2) The striving for democratic, social and ecological standards;
- (3) The maintenance and democratization of the public sphere, particularly public finance; and
- (4) An active struggle for constructive local and regional development.

Participatory processes as such do indeed constitute an essential link between (1), (2), (3) and (4). Here we do see actual and potential possibilities for people to producing and acquiring knowledge and capacities for co-operation in solidarity, for dealing actively with the causes (and the perpetrators) of social and ecological

problems, and – in so doing - for creating (or for being able to create) viable and effective political alliances. As a result, they will have the potential to positively change collective and social life in a sustainable manner – acting in solidarity by networking, locally and regionally, nationally, at the European level and globally. As a result of such a process, struggles over interests between the fractions of capital will be unavoidable. This raises the decisive question for the left, whether and how “certain identities of interests” can be used in order to successfully act against social and ecological destruction, and for introducing sustainable solutions to pressing problems.

In such a context, defensive activities are generally very important, if only by providing and expanding individual and collective possibilities of action, and possibilities of choice in everyday life. Such “choices” e.g. between “more” or “less” competition, between “more” or “less” participation in the exploitation of those who are weaker, or in the waste of resources and in environmental pollution and destruction are presented to us every day. In this respect, we shall have to focus on the limits, within which individuals can choose their lifestyles in a socially and ecologically responsible manner: because they have not learned to do so, and because the necessary societal learning processes have not been organized; because within society, reasonable modes of behaviour are not effectively honoured, nor are destructive modes of behaviour effectively sanctioned, but are indeed provoked and abetted; because the individual possibilities of choice that people need are not really open to them, due to the existing societal structures of production, consumption and everyday life; because those agents who are ultimately economically, economically-politically and socio-politically hegemonic are, in fact, capable of realizing their interests by implementing their policies, and thereby determining the development of the societal structures of production; because those who know that this is socially and ecologically destructive and who want to live in solidarity and in an ecologically appropriate way are too weak to fight the existing leadership within society in a politically effective manner, pursuing the aim of a fundamental change the power structures and the everyday life of society.

A radical renewal of the left will have to mean that, rather than simply propagating “what should be done,” or what “one would like to do if one could,” we should go to where people are already actively fighting, here and now, in greater solidarity, and in a more socially and ecologically responsible manner than the mainstream of our societies, so as to give effective help in strengthening and expanding such trends of resistance..

Such an alternative practice of politics will have to specifically address social activities mainly in four interrelated dimensions: (1) Public funding/social security systems, (2) Development aid, (3) Budget consolidation, (d) the on-going trend towards a militarization of politics, as well as (4) Debt cancellation.

In order to build the capacity to do so, it t will have to address effectively

- (a) The comprehensive issue of the financial markets;
- (b) The “special projects” of the ruling forces, such as privatization, public-private partnerships (PPP), mega-projects, and local and regional problems; these often have to do with energy, transportation, agro-business, and “security/defense,” and

hence with the competitive national positions of the perpetrators of problems, and with concrete technologies and investments;

(c) poverty/social exclusion, discrimination and repression/violence – especially by advocating and implementing social, democratic and ecological minimum standards; and

(d) struggles against existing or planned socially and ecologically destructive projects/practices of governments and international institutions (EU, WTO) such as the EU Services Directives, free trade agreements and WTO regulations, as TTIP and TISA;

(e) struggles against the emerging new armament race and for new approaches to de-militarizing politics, strengthening non-violent forms of conflict resolution.

Today, any deeper analysis of current social activities points to the consolidation of the four interconnected strategic areas of action:

- the struggle against the on-going militarization of conflicts,
- the struggle for democratic, social and ecological standards;
- the struggle for the democratization of the public space and of political decision-making processes over priorities and principles for the mobilization and use of public finances; and
- the movement for active and participatory local and regional development.

In this respect, political engagement for the structural improvement of the conditions of life of the socially and globally poorest and for the organization of the groups and forces active and to be activated in these processes should be particularly emphasized.

Political confrontations, the struggles against militarization and military mobilization, against privatization, destructive projects, corporate practices, mega-projects etc., will take place primarily at the local or at regional levels. Local and regional development is highly relevant for political activity against social and ecological destruction, and therefore for the critique and reconstruction of the economies of the sectors of energy, transportation and agriculture, as well as for the stopping of the current expansion of the MIC/security sector, as well as for its future dismantling. These are the areas, where citizens can and do operate effectively as collective actors, with regard to concrete problem-solving and to the formulation of specific alternatives. This does not necessarily imply a restricted problem horizon, or a “not-in-my-backyard” attitude: Quite to the contrary – in defending their own interests, citizens are being forced e.g. to “think European” from the outset, because their own, specific problems always show an EU dimension, explicitly or latently.

Moreover, local and regional development is strategically important, because it constitutes the complex opposite to on-gong processes of globalization, in particular in the six economic sectors named above. Labour power is not as mobile as capital. It is capable of meeting capital’s needs only to a certain extent – and may itself struggle to limit that limited extent still further. For the social life of the municipalities and the regions, for the prevailing social, democratic and ecological standards and for the decisions taken on public finance they are of central importance. The local, regional and nation state levels are the arenas in which agents from various social

and political groups meet each other and come together most immediately, and where alliances at the respective state, national, EU and global levels are needed in order to impose social standards, rules and laws on public finances even on a local and on a regional level – including the urgently needed help for the global poor – and with a perspective for the reconstruction of sustainable economic structures and an appropriate ways of life on a global scale.

The political confrontations and struggles around the setting or enhancing of social, ecological and democratic minimum standards reflect or change the existing socio-political relations of forces, and their real dynamics.

After all, set standards imply the right to make one's claims effective, and therefore they are the object of demands by specific agencies, with their specific interests. At the same time, they can also define limits of what is admissible, or they may also be re-articulated as demands for specific limits (e.g. maximum working hours). The setting or changing of standards involves complicated processes: *First*, those affected – citizens [and also critical scholars) – articulate what they and others regard as necessary and desirable in order to be able to mitigate or solve problems in a sustainable manner, for example to redress shortcomings in public services, or to reduce traffic noise. *Second*, the collective formulation of demands may be at issue – such as the introduction of limits for admissible noise levels, which are primarily addressed to state or supra-state and political institutions, but also to other agencies, such as corporations and multinationals, etc. These addressees should accept these demands as binding demands on their actions, use them as the basis for legislation, and regulate and manage their implementation. *Third*, struggles must be carried out to realize and to reinforce demands for specific democratic and social rights, for social and ecological minimum standards, and for limits to be imposed on socially and ecologically destructive agencies.