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Will the real left-winger please stand up?

It's time for the left to decisively oppose turbo-capitalism and form new alliances

Read this article in German or Russian.

Capitalism has won the battle between rival systems against 'real socialism', but capitalism is not the solution for humanity. Even if conservative philosophers thought they could see the end of history in escalating neo-liberalism. The latter's globalisation has certainly improved some economic data, reduced poverty in some places and lined the pockets of clever young chaps. But the way in which it organises the relationship between the human species and nature not only destroys the planet, ruins living environments but also deepens the unequal distribution of prosperity and prospects – obscene money-making for a few, hardship and fear of social decline for many, climate change and bee extinction for all.

The forced exploitation of man and nature forms the dominant economic culture. Conflicts about scarce resources and life opportunities escalate into wars and civil wars. Globalisation is striking back in the western world, where the devastation first originated, in the form of flows of refugees and droves of migrants hoping for a better life. The West in turn is preparing fortresses and tearing down democratic and civilisational achievements in order to get the sudden onslaught under control. Reactionaries defend the German soil with clubs, left-liberals do not tire of extolling 'the West' as, despite everything, being the best of all worlds, whilst a caste of deluded and kleptocratic managers is still trying to give their bad decisions and deceptions some semblance of reason.

The mainstream left is offering no alternative

But where is the fundamental criticism of the unholy trinity of money, military and mission which 'the western megamachine' was pushing right

from the start? The political left has become quiet, leaving criticism of modernity to the reactionaries – if not to the left, then to the right. In Germany, for instance, public discourse is determined by the social right-wing coalition of the Alternative for Germany (AfD) and Christian Social Union in Bavaria (CSU).

Once proud socialists have let themselves be reduced to social workers who turn the big problems into small issues in order to avoid a systemic crisis and to keep everything running along smoothly. Their Social Democratic Party (SPD) is collapsing today because its alternatives to the status quo are too small-minded.

Once fundamentally critical ecologists, the Greens, have now been hyped up into beacons of hope of the conservative bourgeoisie, which wants to use greenwashing to cover up its guilt as the ideological support base of the mistakes that have been made. The Greens are threatening to mutate into Chancellor Angela Merkel's second party; they are no longer about fighting structural poverty but about improving middle-class life. And The Left Party? It is breaking down – like the socialists of the 1920s – in horrible discussions about the national question.

European capitalism and imperialism

The public Counter-Enlightenment equates 'left' with the 'really failed socialism' of the Soviet Union. Wrongly so. Undogmatic, democratic, libertarian left-wing people all over the world rigorously rejected the Soviet system, the command or planned economy, the ideology of quantity over quality, 'democratic' centralism and its repressive state apparatus culminating in the gulag.

This system to them represented an erroneous or wicked distortion of humanist socialist ideals. To put Lenin, Stalin and Mao alongside Marx and Engels was the biggest discursive idiocy, one committed by those on the left themselves. By contrast, Rosa Luxemburg, Angela Davis, Petra Kelly and other radical reformists would deserve to be more than just icons of historicising veneration. Even though the 'Eastern bloc' was not a real alternative, ever since it fell there have been no further discussions about alternative systems to western capitalism.

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And yet they are sorely needed. The biggest crimes against humanity emanated from Europeans after they had discovered the trans-oceanic sea routes. The extermination campaigns against the advanced civilisations of South America served the sole purpose of

dignifies them.

stealing treasure to finance European modernity. The Asian and African trade of spices and raw materials was based on mass murders and subjugation. Not to mention something that, until recently, had been airbrushed out of history: Anyone who was impoverished or discriminated against in prosperous Europe emigrated to North America to, with the approval of their home countries, deceive, displace and murder the local population and bring over enslaved Africans.

Liberty, the concept of freedom used in the American Declaration of Independence, reflected the genocidal practice of the European military entrepreneurs and economic migrants: political participation only for those who had acquired land ownership by means of organised deception and tolerated violence. This ideology characterises political majorities of the 'leading western power' to this day. Violence, land-grabbing and racism were intrinsic to it from the very start.

A clear terminology of the left

With the fall of elected governments, colonisation and the arbitrary demarcation of borders, the West has, in pursuit of oil interests, ruined the Middle East. Today, liberal Europe is destroying the economies of Africa, through trade, credit, agricultural, fishing and development policies. The escalating crises in the affected regions are being stoked by arms deliveries. Mass exodus to Europe is bringing workers who, exploited in slave-like conditions, produce organic vegetables for supermarkets and allow companies to circumvent agreed standards. Native workers despair and drift to the right. This all too easily leads to talkshow chatter changing the social class issue of top and bottom into the national issue of inside and outside.

However, the accusation of populism against the right-wing ideologues is hopeless – worse still, it dignifies them; populists are proud of telling the people what they want to hear. To be considered 'left-wing', is by contrast almost completely out of fashion. The term seems discredited. It never had it easy anyway. Everyone learns that the right hand is the clean one. For a long time, left-handed people were considered in need of therapy. Shy people are 'gauche'. In the German language, in everything concerning being (to the) right, cheaters are 'left', meaning crooked. The rule right before left governs daily life. Driving on the left leads to Brexit. It is absurd. An equally incisive, but non-loaded term is not found.

Perhaps some terminological reassurance would help here. Let us imagine two intersecting axes: On one of these, we can depict one's political position towards the social-economic foundations of society. The left pole denotes a decisively anti-capitalist position, the right one an uninhibited profit orientation. The second axis runs vertically to the first, with one end of the pole defined as progressive and the other as reactionary. It provides information about cultural attitudes, from issues of participation through to gender.

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A political subject, as well as the majority of a party, can be progressive on the 'culture axis' and right-wing or indifferent on the 'economy axis'. Left-wing and progressive are not one and the same thing. This is not about splitting hairs. We need terms in order to be able to understand things. 'Left-liberals' are progressive, but are not necessarily left-wing on the question of the social-economic system.

Therefore, it is worth saving the discrete term 'left-wing' to describe a position decisively opposed to turbo-capitalism, unfettered financial markets and economic warfare and which also knows that the 'social question' includes more than social policy and caring for people. It means the whole of the political economy and ecology. If this position is combined with progressive-democratic thinking, the result is a modern, in some ways postmodern, non-traditional new left.

Emerging left-wing movements

The party system is facing perhaps the biggest upheaval in post-war history. The CDU/ SPD/Greens form the social mainstream. An effective right-wing opposition made up of AfD and the CSU is hostile to this mainstream. The Free Democratic Party (FDP) is somewhere in the middle. The Left Party is too weak to put up some resistance on the other side. These circumstances mean that the formation of social compromise is being conducted between the indifferent mainstream and a boastful right. A scary thought. Therefore nothing is more urgent than reconstructing a political left to oppose the shift to the right.

Recently, new movements emerged, not so visibly on the streets, but online they are full of energy, life and ideas for the future. They call themselves the 'European Spring', in Germany 'DiEM25' (Democracy in Europe Movement 2025), and will stand in the next European elections. They are left-wing, ecological, pacifist, grass-roots – as the Greens were once. It could be worthwhile linking them up in a common dialogue with

the ‘old’ left-wingers, those among the socialists, the Greens and anywhere else where it seems like the political home risks being lost and where people do not want to give up the fight for a more just world. And let the progressive liberals be told: it is our civic duty to stand up, and this includes against capitalism’s economic and ecological irrationalities.

Gathering together and regrouping is the order of the day: discussing, looking forward, without dogmatism and malice. Instead of inflicting maximum rhetorical harm on one another, as has been their favourite sport for decades, those on the left should recognise how valuable they are to one another. They could perhaps unite themselves around a common strategic goal: what is important is aligning the life opportunities of all people at the highest possible level, in accordance with the planet’s ecological capacity.

Read the counterpoint to this article here.



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