

André Brie; November 8, 2007; introductory remarks in the discussion at Dresden town hall “What is left today?”

## **What is left today?**

Dear comrades, dear Dresdners,

first of all I want to thank those who invited me and organised this discussion, even against resistance out of our own party. I can, thanks God, not be excluded here. Yet, I also experience regretfully for the second time in not even four years that a few cadres of the Saxon party would rather not deal with my reflections, but rather not let differences of opinion take place at all. I put this upfront consciously and will get back to that, because it belongs to the core of my topic.

However important it is, however necessary to discuss it intensively and openly: I won't enter upon individual concrete contents and demands of a modern left policy. I ask for your understanding for that. My topic is wide. I shall restrict it to problems that in my opinion go all the way through it in its breadth and diversity.

I want the public quarrel between opinions.

I think it is urgently required.

Without it, neither answers to difficult questions, nor democracy and transparency are possible. Moreover, it is a decisive precondition for getting the citizens (women and men) involved again in the discussions in the party and for allowing them to become, from objects of party policy, again the subjects of social decision-making processes.

### **1) A new political culture**

I want to put up front a thought by the social theoretician André Gorz, who determines my thinking about what is left today. André Gorz and Otto Kallscheuer wrote in their introduction to Gorz' confrontation with the end of Soviet socialism that the “social question, the democratic question, the economic question and the freedom dimension of cultural autonomy”, the socialist questions of the 18<sup>th</sup>, the 19<sup>th</sup> and the 21<sup>st</sup> century (the ecological crisis and world hunger) continued to co-exist and to intertwine, but they think that “for their solution, however, there is no common denominator any more, no ‘finally found form’ (as Marx thought this of the Paris commune as the model of the future)”. They warned: “From the overwhelming number of the questions without answers, there grows the yearning for fundamentalist certainties without any questions.”<sup>1</sup>

I plead for taking seriously André Gorz's questions and warnings. The Left, also the German left, has changed in many ways in the past one and a half decades – politically and programmatically. It won't serve it anything, however, if it does not also change culturally. We need social theories, visions and programmes. Yet, the point of departure of renewed socialist movement is political practice, is the concrete criticism of capitalist reality and its practical positive change. There won't be any socialist role model any longer, not in the past and not in the present, neither from Europe, Asia, nor even from Latin America, into which we should force the contradictory reality of

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<sup>1</sup> André Brie, *And now where?*, Nördlingen 1991, p. 11.

society, the economy and the individual as in a Procrustean bed. That makes thought difficult; that makes one's own political self-definition unpleasant. Yet, it makes us open, constructive and capable for the future.

To be left today, that is my first axiom, is pluralistic. Left dissidents are not people who have not yet understood that the other one is right; left dissidents, dear André Hahn, are not soft cakes. They are left people with convictions, analyses and conclusions that may deviate from one's own, with which one can deal and must deal; that should not be defamed or denounced, however. To exclude them, to marginalise them, dear comrade Ernst, implies a private, a completely overtaken claim to the left monopoly on truth.

To be left, I shall return to that, has, I shall claim, its own three unchanged sides. One of them, it cannot, it may not and should not have any more: the self-righteous conviction of the sole right path. Being left has a great, a short while still almost un hoped for present and future. Without a basic change of left political culture, without pluralist culture, and without one's own readiness to not deem oneself the proprietor of the final left or the truth in general, being left threatens to become the past. The left, that also I shall address, was and is always a movement against the expropriation of individuals of their self-determinedness. The expropriation of the left monopoly on the truth after the painful and consequential failure of the past has become the key question, whether it can still do justice to this responsibility and role.

## **2) The current responsibility of the Left**

The question that I was asked to answer in today's event: "What is left today?" has gained a level or currency that would not even have been conceivable one and a half decades ago.

Capitalism left over after the end of state socialism apparently wants to be victorious till its end. The fetters wrestled from it by the worker and trade union and other movements and by the social-liberal bourgeoisie have first been loosened during the last three decades, and in the most recent period been broken to a considerable extent.

In the beginning of the 90s, the notion of the Berlin Republic that after German unification was supposed to step in place of the Bonn Republic, was still defamed from the right as a left battle notion. Yet, one and half decades later, we really have a different republic. This Berlin Republic is therefore everything else but a social, democratic, and ecological progress, it is the turning away from a capitalism on any be it only partial social and democratic leash.

Arno Luik in "Stern" has called this policy and its result in rare sharpness a coup "from the very top". "Do the CDU/SPD/CSU/FDP/Green politicians defend their policies in such a vehement way, because they know that they are doing a coup from the very top? A coup? Yes, the Agenda 2010 and Hartz IV are ciphers for the concentrated attack from the very top against the social state. They call it "restructuring" – but the choice of words only hides the qualitative leap into another commonweal. The Berlin Republic figures for the departure from the solidary community. And nothing will remain of the ideals fixed from the ideals in the Basic

Law – except on paper and sometimes still in beautiful oratory.”<sup>2</sup> Luik is also right, when he points to the fact that this politics “ruins the state, makes it incapable of action, and makes politics impotent.”

It is the realisation of an “economy of expropriation” (David Harvey). In the social sense, this policy means the million-fold exclusion of people. It means a new and a very deep social division. Market liberalism imposed first intellectually, then politically, and finally economically and socially has apparently passed the zenith of its intellectual and political dominance. Yet, at least in the Germany of the years 2006, 2007, it has won an additional, maybe last, but very consequential victory, a cultural victory in 2007: The society seems to tolerate this split and to accept it, even though for so many people, it means their being expropriated of chances for life and participation and that this assumes a degree threatening the whole society.

Under the impression of the present, for many people dramatic consequences especially of the Hartz IV laws, tax policy, the lasting redistribution towards the top and the privatisation of public property, as well as the restriction of citizens’ rights, the medium and long-term consequences have been discussed much too little. For the concerned, it is old-age and child poverty, wage dumping, destruction of professional qualification and social status and massive solidification of social pre-determination of life chances.

Two weeks ago, a survey of children and young people was published that shows how much already children from socially disadvantaged parents – in contrast to the politicians that bring them into this situation – are aware that they pay social exclusion with lower educational, training and job chances. For many of them, the way from birth into poor educational results, own joblessness, exclusion and old-age poverty is predetermined by this policy.

Yet also for society, this policy will become threatening. There develops a million-strong new class of the excluded and those without social safety girdle that will hardly be possible to develop a social force of resistance. The threat for this society from social cold, from the expropriation of millions of children from their chances for life and self-determination precisely will not grow if this cast of excluded does not resist in a socially effective way. It is a class of isolation, anxiety, a class also of cultural expropriation that in its social existence is even subjected to individual privatisation and isolation.

### **3) An emancipatory answer to the property question**

Social division has a high price. It destroys democracy and orientation towards democratic values, solidarity, communal sense and tolerance. It strengthens the already over-powerful economic monopolies, the large companies and banks. It also weakens those that are still tied in the capitalist accumulation system and the counter-force of the trade unions and other social forces.

In all of that, it is the question of no more and no less than the poverty and property question. The end of East European state socialism did not only signify the privatisation of state industry, banks, ground and soil and other large property values in these countries in favour of the companies and banks in the West or domestic

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<sup>2</sup> Arno Luik: The coup from the very top, Stern of October 21, 2004.

oligarchies, it was also a decisive point of departure in the metropolises for asking the capitalist power and property in a new and yet more radical way.

Ralf Dahrendorf, one of the last great liberal intellectuals, said it in 1994: “There are times, where social conflicts and their scientific discussion assume a fundamental or constitutional character... That was the case in the 18<sup>th</sup> century...; it is valid again at the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. At such times, the rules of the game of power and society are themselves up for grabs.”<sup>3</sup> The entrepreneurial associations and their political administrators were ready to ask this question. The democratic left critical of capitalism was up to now not capable and not ready to seize on it with contemporary and emancipatory content and social, democratic, and ecological alternatives and make it the subject of real politics.

If you follow André Gorz, and I want to do that, namely that “socialism... can only be understood in connection with capitalism, as its positive negation”<sup>4</sup>, then precisely this is the first reason for the new, burning topicality of left politics. It must be asked with great urgency and with a great sense of human responsibility for the fate of millions of immediately concerned people, who live their life today, and to whom their life chances are taken today; the new and concrete destructive force, the – one more time André Gorz – “unbearable follow-up consequences of market economy” must be set renewed and concrete frontiers. Gorz is certainly right: “Socialism is dead insofar as it understood itself as a *system*, which in the name of its scientific pretence, and total rationalisation cut itself off from life-world anchoring and threw out the claim to individual emancipation and self-shaping of life. Yet socialism will continue to exist as movement and social time horizon or live up again, by understanding itself in accordance with its more original significance as a striving to complete the emancipation of individuals begun by the bourgeois revolution, that is to realise it also in areas, where individuals in capitalism remain subject to system imperatives, relationships of rule and determination by strangers.”<sup>5</sup>

Put another way: The left is in demand, in a new and different way, but more than in the past, asked in an existential way: as a movement capable of having its way against the destructive commercialisation and privatisation of education, culture and information, health, social and other forms of security, as movement against social injustice, exclusion and division, as part of the movement against the destruction of global and local ecological conditions of existence and against a militaristic organisation of international relations having become a threat to existence. The left must become an emancipatory movement against the determination by strangers of the individuals and their expropriation from their possibilities of self-development and against the privatisation of the great social and cultural common goods. It needs capability both for a future and capability for political change for people who live today, to whom their social and cultural life is taken today.

#### **4) Unchangeable axioms of left politics**

Being left was historically always subject to change. Ever since the socialist left has taken over this notion from the liberal bourgeoisie and has taken its political place, there always were four unchangeable positions of left politics and an incomplete, but still very far-reaching consensus over them:

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<sup>3</sup> Ralf Dahrendorf: *Modern social conflict*, Munich 1994, p. 49.

<sup>4</sup> André Gorz, p. 94.

<sup>5</sup> André Gorz, p. 93 f.

First of all, the great majority of the socialist left understood itself as decidedly internationalist and antinationalist.

Second, it was always a movement for social justice and social equality and made its policy on the basis of the conditions and interests of the socially disadvantaged, the expropriated and the disempowered.

Third, different from other groups that turned against social injustice, it asked for the socio-economic and political conditions of this situation and asked to change them.

Fourth, finally, the left also always had an emancipatory and liberating claim to free people from determination from outside by capital determination, profit dominance and market logic.

These are the inalienable axioms of the socialist left also at present and in the future.

Heinrich Heine, in an exemplary fashion in his famous “Lutetia” has founded his contradictory and reticent communist confession by the reason that two voices called him to communism, on the one hand, “that all people have the right to eat”, and he added: “May happen what is right! May it be broken, this old world, where innocence went asunder, where egoism flourished, where man was exploited by man! May they be destroyed completely, these whitewashed graves, where lies and injustice housed!”

The second of the two compelling voices that bewitched him as he wrote was “still more gigantic and infernal than the first, because it is that of hate, hate which I devote to a party, whose most terrible opponent is communism and which for this reason is our common enemy. I speak of the party of so-called representatives of nationality in Germany, of those false patriots, whose love of their fatherland only consists in a stupid hatred against foreigners and foreign countries and who pour out their spite every day in particular against France... Out of hatred against adherents of nationalism, I could almost love the Communists.”<sup>6</sup>

I remark briefly and on the margin that internationalism of the Left and the consequences of global markets and division of labour should also be an impulse for a positive attitude to European integration; not towards its present radically market and business-centred reality, but very much so towards a European integration that offers a contemporary political framework to the struggles for social justice and the social state, for which the individual states no longer suffice.<sup>7</sup>

## **5) A libertarian left**

These four basic positions of the socialist left and the practical consequences were always interpreted in very different, not so seldom also contradictory ways. And precisely the emancipative claim, especially if you understood it as self-determination and self-liberation of people and people, was also consciously ignored in practice, if the individual was subjected to society, the “cause” and the monopoly on truth of an allegedly scientific left approach. The left need not invent anything new here. Being

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<sup>6</sup> Heinrich Heine: Works and Letters in 10 volumes, vol. 6, Berlin 1962, p. 246 f.

<sup>7</sup> compare on that André Brie: The Left and Europe, in: *Blätter für deutsche und internationale Politik*, 8/2007, p. 985-994.

left today, however, must finally leave behind any disdain and low esteem of individual and social liberty, universality of human rights and democracy and place the free-self-determined individual into the centre of its politics and its ideas of sociality. It can refer in this question to some of its most significant theoreticians and politicians and to intellectuals that were close to it, even though they were refused by the Communist party left.

As representative of many, I want to quote Rosa Luxemburg, who claimed the freedom of the “dissident” and “unrestrained democracy” for the most principled reasons: “You may decree the negative, the reduction, but not construction, not the positive. A virgin country. Thousand of problems. Only experience is capable of correcting things and of opening up new ways. Only life gushing unrestrainedly invents thousands of new forms, improvisations, lightens up creative force, corrects itself all wrong moves. The public move of states with limited freedom is so limited, so poor, so schematic, so infertile, because it bars itself, by the exclusion of democracy, the life springs of all spiritual wealth and progress. In the political, as well as in the economic and social domain. The whole mass of the people needs to participate. Otherwise socialism will be decreed and imposed from the green table of a dozen of intellectuals.”<sup>8</sup>

Precisely that has occurred and four decades later, Albert Camus had to remark in a bitter and poignant way: “If freedom is demeaned today or cast into chains, then not because its enemies have betrayed it, but precisely because it has lost its nature-given protector. Yes, freedom is a widow; yet we need to add for truth’s sake: she is the widow of everyone of us. Freedom is the cause of the oppressed, and its protectors at all times come from oppressed people... From the 19<sup>th</sup> century on, the workers’ movement have taken on the honourable double task to struggle for freedom and justice, and it would never have occurred to them in a dream to consider them as incompatible. Yes, the decisive events of the 20<sup>th</sup> century consisted in that the revolutionary movement gave up the values of freedom and that the socialism of freedom retreated ever more before the socialism of Caesars and of the military. At the same time, a certain hope disappeared from the world, and loneliness began for every free person.”<sup>9</sup>

If we do not practice this liberty in our own party, instead exclude the dissidents and “sectarianise” them out, we need not even step under the eyes of the women and men citizens or possible coalition partners with the claim that we learnt from history, quite apart from the fact that we would cut ourselves off from them and their lively discussions.

## **6) Condemned to be realistic**

The changes and the concreteness of social, political and other situations anyway demands changed and always very concrete answers.

I don’t want to shy away from a confrontation over the privatisation of the Dresden apartment society. I did not take any position on that up to now, because in the light of the difficulty of the decision I thought that it should not be judged by outsiders. In my political and parliamentary activity I at times also stood before situations, where I did not have the choice between beautiful and ugly, but only between bad and even

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<sup>8</sup> Rosa Luxemburg: The Russian Revolution. Berlin. In: Works, vol. 4, p. 360.

<sup>9</sup> Albert Camus: Bread and freedom, in: Defence of liberty. Political essays, p. 49.

worse. Sometimes I had the occasion to refuse myself to both. However, in a vote on the then threatening Iraq war, we, my comrades and I, paid the high price that ultimately the position of Bush's followers was able to impose itself in the European Parliament. Sometimes, there only remains this choice. Sometimes I did not know either, what the bad is and what is the even worse.

Up to now, I only said publicly that exclusionary procedures that were tolerated by the Saxon regional executive of the former PDS and the partly actively promoted infringements against statutes and law to me are just as unacceptable as the division of the city council fraction and the factual incompatibility resolution now pushed by the city executive and the regional chairwomen. That is left. That is the left political culture of the past. However, it cannot and should not be left today.

Who does not read the stories of the Bolsheviki or the SED or the workers' movement as they were published in the GDR, but deals with their real history, beginning with the October revolution, the treatment of the USPD, by way of the KPD opposition, or the antifascist popular front of the 30s up to Benjamin, Bloch, Sartre or Bahro will hit hundred-fold upon precisely this culture and politics and on how they have weakened, destroyed and intellectually and politically devoured the socialist Left itself. Who wants to find especially many examples of such policies and their devastating consequences for the Left, may find them by the way in party-communist local politics and not only in Germany. We have no right to turn these childhood and developmental illnesses even into our old-age senility. Also not in Dresden. These are confrontations unneeded on the left. This is exclusively personal power politics.

Since I had myself be invited here, I will however also have to take position on privatisation itself. Also for the reason that I cannot see a great political and left difference between those that approved complete privatisation and those who condoned a 74.9 percent privatisation at bad financial and legal consequences. If I look at them altogether, as I know them from many political discussions and decisions, Christine Ostrowski, Ronald Weckesser and Ingrid Mattern on the one hand, Cornelia Ernst on the other, all of them to me are equally honest left people; I explicitly include here my non-party member comrade Ralf Lunau.

The complete privatisation of the Dresden Apartment Society, however, is not left. Nobody has claimed that, nobody can claim that. It is not any more left to agree to a privatisation to 74.9% and at these bad conditions. It will also not be left if the latter today call themselves "opponents of privatisation", and it will also be anything else but "left" if they claim today in the media against the facts that they approved only a 50% privatisation. I experience at meetings in the whole federation that this privatisation is a problem for the credibility of our policy against the expropriation of public goods. That Dresden by the way is by far not an isolated case, I only mention on the margin. Dresden, however, has become the single example, on which there is federation-wide discussion. PDS and other left-wing local politicians have also been in similar binds elsewhere by the dozens, and have made similar decisions, been forced to make similar decisions.

As was said, there really arises the question for the honesty and consequence of our policy against the privatisation of public property. Only: this was not the question in Dresden at all. The city was bankrupt, not by our doing. It stood right before administrative rule and the disempowerment of its elected popular representatives by

the government presidium. And the Apartment Society in practice had for a long time already not been real public property, but given its horrendous debts had been in the de facto property and under control of the creditor banks. Therefore, the beautiful, left programmes of any kind did not help. There, we needed to make a completely different decision, outside of our social policy and long-term concepts. Being left only became possible again by complementing the decision in a social Charta seeking its example in the rest of Germany. No, the resolution itself is not left, just like any other resolution in the light of its – in the one or the other form unavoidable - anti-social consequences would not have been left. For many problems, conditions and contradictions, we won't find the answers in our papers. The actor Ulrich Matthes to the question: "Were you a left youth?" gave an answer that a left being capable of learning might take to heart: "Of course! My father also considered this to be correct and even supported that. Yet in this extra-parliamentary opposition back then, I found many things threateningly fanatic. I always thought, by God, there are after all grey zones in human relations, in the judgement of things; there are after all the most serious contradictions, you can't bite these off after all, only so that one's own image of the world does not shake."<sup>10</sup>

If left politics always also asked for social and political origins, then it would be wrong in my view to prosecute the left-wing advocates of a 100 or 74.9 percent privatisation with the call: Hold the thieves. The situation of the city of Dresden and its apartment complex is the result of ruling policy in Germany, Europe and the world. Who wants local self-administration, even socially effective left local policy, will have to take care that the social policy framework and pre-conditions for that are established or re-established.

The situation of the city of Dresden is also the result of a market and company-oriented German unification policy, not last by the SPD that has to take responsibility its strange rules for old debts of the East-German local and cooperative apartment enterprises. It started the privatisation and municipalisation of the local and cooperative apartment properties in East Germany. It has turned many East German apartment societies into the actual property of the banks. I am very glad that the new Left in Germany also encompasses former leading social democrats. I know about their energetic confrontations with market radicalism. The Left can learn a lot from their offensive self-confidence. Only, there should also belong here to reflect their own former share of responsibility for today's situation in a critical way. Local women and men politicians are the foundation of the representative parliamentary system in the Federal Republic. Yet, they were the first ones to be disempowered and politically expropriated to be then in a position to drive forward the material expropriation of the communities. Don't turn them, who in their overwhelming majority commit themselves in such a wonderful way, into the scapegoats of this policy, and please: Do not even drive forward actively this dishonest game!

I can and therefore won't resign to the fact that the Left in Dresden was split at a point when the Left in Germany as a whole came together. I am not ready and not prepared to assess whether Ronald Weckesser or Ingrid Mattern is one or five percent less left or more left than Cornelia Ernst or André Hahn. That is impossible. That is stupid. That is irresponsible. The Left in Germany in its convictions, its thinking, its concrete way of making politics is diverse and different. Yet, it does not

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<sup>10</sup> Ulrich Matthes, Interview, *Neues Deutschland*, 24/25 December 2005, p. 3.

belong into two fractions, fundamentally not, and even less and least of all immediately before a mayoral campaign. I know more or less what kind of injuries you inflicted upon each other in the meantime. However, neither Christine Ostrowski, Ingrid Mattern or Ralf Lunau, nor Cornelia Ernst, Hans-Jürgen Muskulus or Tilo Kießling have the right to leave this situation unchanged. It is always also about you. Every person needs to remain true to herself. Yet, precisely for that reason, you don't have the right to have two fractions, because you are all left people, and after all, it is about the women and men citizens of Dresden and about the possibility to make effective left politics for them and with them!

### **7) For a political and social change of direction**

After 1990, it could only be our objective to safeguard the possibilities for left politics and movement for the future by way of a fundamental renewal and a ruthless self-criticism and to win them back. This possibility has articulated itself faster and to a much larger extent than at least I thought. It lies founded both in the ever more apparent crisis of neoliberalism as well as in the coming up of the social and political forces of an alternative.

With the elimination of the political, social and other fetters wrestled from it in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century, capitalism has also unleashed again its general as well as its self-destructive forces. Above all, it seems to me that the neoliberal project measured by the present social, ecological and economic challenges and possibilities turns out counter-productive. Its genuinely own adaptation potential, however, you may judge it, has been exhausted. Neoliberal, market-radical capitalism has become an obstacle to the possible and necessary social changes. That concerns not only so obvious questions like climate and environmental policy, the renewal of social cohesion, an educational, child and youth policy capable of a future but also socially oriented, or the overcoming of misery, social and cultural destruction in the south and its dependence, but also European policy and the indispensable social cohesion in the EU, the democratic and social shaping of globalisation, as well as the ever more threatened and incomparably more necessary international capacity for peace. The reproductive capacity of a society and a world in which everything, almost everything is only subjective to economic use and commercialisation is no longer guaranteed.

In his essay, "Sailing against the wind", Michael Brie evaluated the situation correctly in my view: "Neoliberalism in its consequence undermines its own legitimacy. Total commercialisation destroys the bases for individuality and a self-determined life... The lack of alternatives created and the power of the factual loses its hegemonic force to the degree that it becomes illegitimate, asocial and dangerous. That way, it becomes a force that relies less on conviction and radiance than on mere force or the absence of concrete ways out. That way, it is undermined. Neoliberalism is in a crisis of its legitimacy and increasingly of its force of imposition. For neoliberalism as well, it holds: 'Ideology does not fail against arguments; ideology fails against reality.'<sup>11</sup><sup>12</sup>

Measured not only by its economic reform capacity and social acceptance or measured by electoral results, neoliberalism seems to have passed its zenith.

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<sup>11</sup> Heiner Flassbeck: Economic policy summer fantasies. In: *Blätter für deutsche und internationale Politik*, Issue 10/2006, p. 1233.

<sup>12</sup> Michael Brie: Sailing against the Wind. Conditions of a political change of direction in Germany, in: Michael Brie, Cornelia Hildebrandt, Meinhard Meuche-Mäker (eds.): *The Left. In which direction the Republic is changing*, Berlin 2007, p. 263 f.

Demands for the reform of Hartz IV, pension at 67, a new distributive justice or a basically changed Afghanistan policy, withdrawal of the Federal Army included, receive clear approval in public opinion.

A structurally, even if politically and culturally very heterogeneous and politically largely passive cultural majority has become possible not only beyond CDU/CSU and FDP, but also beyond predominant neoliberalism, which reaches however far into the ranks of SPD and Greens. In the abstract, the necessity, the possibility and the social as well as political carriers of an anti-neoliberal alternative have developed. Concretely, practically and from the intellectual and cultural point of view, it is still weak, however.

Nevertheless, the conditions have changed fundamentally.

On the one hand, the founding process of the "Left" has changed the whole tectonic of party politics in the Federal Republic and already upset it. The party researcher Karl Rudolf Korte noted: "Under this pressure, that there will manifest itself something on the left, which is more than a daily event, all parties will change. The German party system is moving."<sup>13</sup> Or as Ingar Solty expressed it: The Left Party is no "weakened reminder from past ages..., but a new foundation of a party that is carried out... in the midst of hegemonic crisis of neoliberalism"<sup>14</sup>.

The executive of the opinion research institute *Emnid* summarised this development as follows: "What has changed since PDS times, when in the East it got roughly 22 of the votes? Almost everything. Especially: Those sorted out with Hartz IV finally found a symbol for anger and the will to commit themselves for their left dream of the other society. Suddenly, no longer ducking is the reaction but open opposition... The protest party PDS became the programmatic party THE LEFT, because it in the East held high the goals of the 'good old SPD'."<sup>15</sup>

On the other hand, also other counter-forces have become stronger in the recent past, partly also as a result of new political scopes of freedom that have developed by the rise of the Left Party. There is a certain politicisation of the trade unions. Social protest movements at least at times, the globalisation-critical movements apparently have even found a lasting influence on the political situation in Germany. The pressure reaches into the parties, as was shown last but not least by the decisions of the Green congress of Göttingen and the SPD congress at Hamburg. Whoever limited the Left and being left today to the party The Left, would anyway be ill-advised. The Left in the past and at present is organised by far more broadly and for its major part not even in party politics. It reaches into parts of the SPD and the Greens. It reaches by way of important parts of the trade unions and business councillors, feminist, anti-racist, and peace policy groups, youth and student organisations, globalisation-critical and ecological movements up to intellectual circles in the churches, schools, universities and the media.

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<sup>13</sup> „The voters benefit“. Karl-Rudolf Korte: The Left changes the party system. In: *Parliament*, no. 29-30/ July 16, 2007 (<http://www.bundestag.de/dasparlament/2007/29-30/MenschenMeinungen/16444748.html> ).

<sup>14</sup> Ingar Solty: Transformation of the German party system and the European historical responsibility of the Left Party. In: *Das Argument*, Issue 270/2007, p. xxx. (15)

<sup>15</sup> Klaus-Peter Schöppner: „The humus of the Left“ – Strongest force in the East, first successes in the West: How the protest party PDS could become a programme party“. In: *Leipziger Volkszeitung*, of August 3 2007.

Up to now, the social and political actors of a political alternative are not yet capable of a common social movement. I quote again Michael Brie: "However, up to this point the demonstrations critical of globalisation and for peace are carried mainly by the upper classes, while the anti-Hartz IV protests were marked by the threatened working people and the precarious. The protests against the G8 summit in Heiligendamm, as successful as they were, lacked mainly the women and men citizens from the social bottom. The conflict lines between the social and the cultural left, the trade union and the ecologically and feminist-oriented left, between the left middle classes and the workers and employees, the migrants, the cut-off precarious cannot be ignored. The potentials of the social movements and the political Left for a change of direction still have to grow together at first. The Left could play an important role in that."<sup>16</sup>

Whoever carries out a realistic analysis of the possibilities for a political change of direction in Germany, will notice further weaknesses and deficits.

Despite a few results, especially two decisive conditions were only weakly articulated.

On the other hand, the social movements are not only heterogeneous and conflicting within themselves, but still too weak for an emancipatory and lasting character of a political alternative.

On the other hand, the diverse left up to now is completely insufficiently ready and prepared to change the intellectual and cultural climate in Germany. In there belong not only intellectual and realistic concepts and programmes, but the energetic political organisation of an alternative discourse reaching far into society and the overcoming of social resignation. For good election results, it is sufficient that people refuse the ruling policy. It might possibly even be sufficient for a majority in the federal parliament for a red-red-green coalition. It is not sufficient for a different policy. That requires a basis not primarily in a federal parliament majority, but in a different intellectual climate, in the confidence of the people that alternative policies are not only desirable, but also realistic and realisable and in the independent social and political commitment of hundreds of thousands of people themselves. At least on this question, the Left bears some own responsibility for the fact that the prerequisites for a social policy change are not sufficient yet. With the exception of the globalisation critical and ecological movements, their intellectual and organisational efforts and results in this area are rather small.

### **8) The capacity for a strategic project**

In this context, I want to consciously return one more time to André Hahn's reproach that a few members of his fraction in the Saxon Regional Parliament were soft-cakes, because in the context of the demands of their fraction, they also ask for the political, legal and financial feasibility. I do not want to repeat my criticism of political culture but address a very essential question of left politics under current conditions that André Hahn, if I take his strategy paper for the regional parliament elections 2009 seriously, is very conscious about and on which I actually thought to be of the same opinion with him.

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<sup>16</sup> Michael Brie, opus cit., p. 268.

Protest against the politics of social, democratic and legal destruction in Germany and Europe or against the militarisation of international politics and wars of aggression is necessary, by the way also for a lively democracy, and it is legitimate. For the Left, social protest has always played a special role. That cannot be different, but first of all, social and political protest and decisive political alternatives are not a task only for the parliamentary oppositional status of a left party, but also for its governmental participation. Second, therefore, a responsible Left Party will also have to link its protest and its oppositional policy with the development of realistic alternatives in conformity with the law and which can be financed.

Protest without realistic alternatives will quickly exhaust itself and solidify social pessimism. Protest without social and democratic alternatives can often also be manipulated by the right-wing extreme. It is moreover dishonest and everything else but emancipatory if we divide our policy into one policy as parliamentary opposition and into another for possible governmental participations. With such a political schizophrenia, we would by the way also crash very quickly from the ten or fifteen percent the Left can aspire to at federal elections and the 25 percent possible at East German elections.

Dietmar Bartsch, a couple of weeks ago, during his balance on 100 days Left Party be it with a wink of the eye, as the media reported, that it would after all not be bad if the Left made itself superfluous by obtaining the minimal wage in Germany, the overcoming of Hartz IV, the correction of the increase of the age of entry into pension and the withdrawal of German troops from international interventions. Yes, that would be terrible, because our task goes far beyond. Moreover, there becomes visible here the largest problem for a governmental participation of the Left. It must safeguard, in an alliance with other parties, its differentiable profile going far beyond a coalition agreement with other parties. In our governmental participations up to now – at least to the women and men voters - this has not succeeded in a convincing way. It seems to me, however, that we are starting in the meantime in Berlin to develop this capacity.

The responsibility of the Left does not exhaust itself to achieve a certain social-democratic correction of politics. It does even less exhaust itself in being majority provider for the SPD. The New Left is not a transitory phenomenon. It stands for a strategic project of basic change of orientation in the Federal Republic of Germany and in Europe, for the overcoming of the socially, democratically, ecologically and also economically destructive neoliberal market radicalism.

That won't be possible in a single step. Depending on political relationships of forces and electoral results as well as of social climate, the Left will be ready and prepared for problematic compromise, individual corrections, at the same time, it will have to orient its policy, its organisational and intellectual work in a persevering and effective way towards more far-reaching goals. We will be asked for realism in a merciless way. This may not signify either to leave these goals out of sight nor our own women and men voters, because we have provoked the impression among them, with us everything will immediately become different. As far as Hartz IV is concerned, immediate corrections especially concerning the level of the financial subsidy and the overcoming of the demeaning situation of dependence are necessary. However, to develop from these payments step by step a humanly dignified basic security for all

people would be a really emancipatory project aimed at social change. That might be conceptualised in a similar way in other areas as well.

The Left must figure for the regaining of the public community system, and that with special urgency as far as the future resources education and culture are concerned. Today's left asks the property question, but not as an orthodox demand for nationalisation, but as a question for the chances for a self-determined life of the individual and its social equality and security.

The left wants the public control of investments and of interest developments.

On the agenda and future order of today's left, a far-reaching democratisation of society will occupy a central place: the clear strengthening of plebiscite democracy and the participation of civil society organisation, the winning back and continued development of forms of economic democracy, the introduction of participative budgets, the democratisation of public existential services and of social insurance systems.

It is still unlikely that in 2009 the SPD and the Greens will be capable of an alternative political project with the Left Party, but it is also no longer excluded. The Left should not save them the responsibility, and at the same time create all prerequisites for that. Millions of people and ultimately the real society need a real alternative.

In 1999, Eric Hobsbawm wrote in his impressive preface for the re-edition of the *Communist Manifesto* : "It is unlikely that such a 'post-capitalist society' will correspond to the traditional models of socialism or even the 'really existing' socialisms of the Soviet-area. Which forms it will take and to what extent it might incorporate the humanistic value conceptions of the communism represented by Marx and Engels would be dependent on the political action that would bring along this change. After all, such action, following the words of the *Manifesto*, is of essential significance for the shaping of historical change."<sup>17</sup>

Our political action, I am convinced of that, must be emancipatory policy, politics that frees people from social injustice and determination from outside. That is the real responsibility of today's left. That is at the same time, the greatest challenge for itself, for its continued change of self.

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<sup>17</sup> Eric Hobsbawm, Introduction, in: Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels: *The Communist Manifesto. A modern edition*, Hamburg, Berlin, 1999, p. 35.