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FOR A LIFE MORE JUST. THE FOUR-IN-ONE-PERSPECTIVE¹

Without a vision – however uncertain – as to how a new society would be like, it is difficult to be involved in politics that can engage many. Some orientation has been provided during the last 150 years through workers’ movements seeking to overcome alienated wage labor and fight in the here and now for wages, collective bargaining and jobs. It is against this kind of concept of liberation that the women’s movements of the 20th century came forward, insisting that there is more to work than that which we find in the form of wage labor. They stressed that the sphere of the home was both a site of unfreedom as well as one of the human provision of care— and that recognizing house- and family-work is basic for a kind of thinking which takes the liberation of all human beings as its goal.

Karl Marx makes even more explicit that which is not sufficiently clear in either of these movements: that the development of each individual should be a precondition for the development of all. Translated into our sober language, what is meant is that a goal of liberation must be to allow the capacities that lie dormant in each of us to unfold.

And finally, in all of these – the workers’ movements, the women’s movements and in the question of the individual development of each—there is a precondition which is so fundamental that it even seems superfluous to name it: The liberation of humans can only be taken up by themselves, it cannot be fought for them, it cannot be an act from above. “When we do not free

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ourselves it remains without consequence for us,” wrote Peter Weiss. Politics for a different society as our current one must mean politics from below.

LIFE IS MORE THAN LABOR

More and more people cannot access the realm of labor or no longer earn wages. Tired, weary and discouraged they see all hope for change in demands for wages and workplace security of those who are still ‘laboring’. It is against this that I searched for a utopia that does not dismiss this kind of action, but which at the same time incorporates the hope of many others and strives towards a humanly dignified goal. The art of politics, as I learned recently from Rosa Luxemburg, is not about defining the “right” goal and then implementing it; the art of politics is about building connections, about creating a space of orientation which can re-contextualize fragmented struggles.

I take my consternation seriously when the government promises to create more work— as if we didn’t have enough work about us, necessary for the survival of society and which remains undone. It is not about magically coaxing new work out of a hat but about distributing the work that we have in a just manner. That does not mean allocating workplaces equally to all capable of working. It means instead that all of us can conceive of distributing all human activities – employment, reproduction, our own development and politics – proportionally among each of these spheres.

Since, according to our framework we have way too much work, we can depart from a concept of a workday entailing sixteen hours. In this workday each of the four dimensions of life, in an ideal-type calculation, are allotted four hours each. This is obviously not conceived of mechanically, something to be carried out with a stopwatch. Rather it should serve as a compass to steer each of our steps.

In the first part, in the well-known sphere of wage labor it is immediately clear that to speak of a crisis, because we're running out of labor, departs from a highly restrictive concept of labor and clings on to this concept – no matter at what cost. Yet from the perspective of a more integral concept of life and its human conduct the situation looks radically different. A new guiding principle in labor politics would mean a necessary shortening of every person's labor time to one fourth of the time spent actively, that is to four hours. Thus, the problem of unemployment including precarious and part-time employment would be obsolete since we would then have fewer people than workplaces. According to this concept, we all pursue part-time employment and the term itself ceases to be meaningful. We can concentrate on the quality of work and on the question of whether each is provided for adequately in the deployment of their capabilities. Thus, it will no longer be necessary to carry out labor involving the same repetitive movements as in Charlie Chaplin's *Modern Times*. But also the modern form of work in front of the computer screen, exerting an unilateral burden on us should be taken critically, leading towards a concept of labor which joins the greatest possible diversification with the development of all human senses.

EMANCIPATION FOR EVERYONE

Reproductive work, the second of the four dimensions, is not only to be conceived of as work around house and family. It brings together all which is necessary for the reconstruction of civil society. It encompasses work on each of ourselves and on others – that which we are used to defining as the human dimension of humans. And that which led Marx, following Charles Fourier, to note that, “the degree of women's emancipation is the natural measure of general emancipation” since it is “here, in the relation of women to men, of the weak to the strong, that the victory of human nature over brutality most clearly appears.”

When also the weaker may develop in the same measure, what is truly human surfaces, also encompassing love. According to Marx, it is “in the relation of man to woman” that is decided “to what extent the needs of humans... have become a human need, the extent to which he, in his individual existence, is at the same time a social being”. This applies also to the elderly, the handicapped, the ill, and includes even our relationship to nature. In Grimm’s fairy tales the relationship of ecology and help among humans is shown with foresight. An old woman kneels on the ground and sews together the torn up earth. When the youngest son of the king inquires about her doing, she in turn asks about his. This is how she can help him in his search for the fountain of life for his dying father.

For reproductive and family work this means first and foremost its generalization. Just as no one should be left out of employed labor, the same applies to reproductive work. All humans, men and women can and should develop their social human capabilities. This resolves the contention surrounding payments for child-rearing without devaluing the quality of the work that is carried out in this area. On the contrary, only now, in its generalization, rather than its being assigned only to women and mothers, is it possible to achieve our demand that reproductive work is skilled work and as such needs to be learned, just as applies to other labor.

The third area is about unfolding life-long development through learning, about living not only as consumer, but enjoying it actively and herewith to be able to draft a different concept of a good life. Put differently: we should no longer accept that some speak many languages, dance, make music, compose, paint and travel, that they accomplish themselves as fully as Goethe did; while others ought to be happy if they can read and write at all.

All humans possess a development potential which comes to life out of the slumber of the possible. To activate all human senses should no longer be a luxury only accessible to the rich. Rather, each human being should be able to live according to her or his capabilities. In order to accomplish this, space and time for this is needed.

For the fourth dimension of life, that in which humans are political beings, the following demand is made: constructing a society does not mean specialization on the basis of labor. No longer should some do politics while others – and these are by far the majority – must carry the burden of their consequences.

A NEW TIME REGIME

The four dimensions of human life can be woven together in an alternative model: it is an outline for a more comprehensive definition of justice and which is possible to be formulated by women today. It takes as its point of departure the division of labor and the time dedicated to each. In other words, it seeks to alter our societies' time regime in a fundamental way.

One could decide to work on each of the four areas of labor individually: wage, reproductive, political, and individual development. This would result in a division of labor in which certain groups would take up one of the four areas in isolation as their individual hallmark. Some, led by their class consciousness, would take up labor politics which would be effective for those employed. Others would search for a perspective of the past, a backwards utopia for mothers which nails us lively women to the cross of history, as the philosopher Ernst Bloch put it.

A third group would work towards the development of an elite, which would show, with Olympic talent, what human capabilities can be like. A fourth group

would take participatory politics to insignificant areas: they would make television a model institution for the wishes of viewers; they would incorporate the employees into the preparation of Christmas festivities or seek the participation of the population in recycling activities. In all of these cases we would see that each area, taken as the sole focus point of politics can become downright reactionary.

The art of politics lies in the weaving together of all four areas. No one area should be followed without the others, since what is sought is a political constitution of life which, when carried out, would be enjoyed as truly lively, meaningful, engaging, relishing. This is not an immediate goal; it is not capable of being implemented here and now. But it can serve as a compass for our demands, as the basis of our critique, as hope, as a concrete utopia which incorporates all human beings; and in which finally, the development of each and every one may become the precondition for the development of all.