

Farewell to Liberty, Equality and Fraternity:  
Is the Left still on the Left?

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# Farewell to Liberty, Equality and Fraternity: Is the Left still on the Left?

Dirk Maxeiner and Michael Miersch

## **Durable Values**

**T**he Left has won. Admittedly, its economic and political concepts have failed wherever they were applied. It has nevertheless conquered people's minds. Everybody nowadays shares values that once were decidedly on the Left. They are nowadays embraced by people around the world who would not consider themselves of the Left.

Let us hasten to add that we intentionally use the term 'Left' without differentiating. There are, of course, all sorts of differences between the social democratic parties and the Attac movement of the anti-globalisers, between the metal workers unions and Third World initiatives. 'Left' for our purposes designates a somewhat ill-defined canon of values and identification with a historic movement.

Everybody is for democracy and liberty; for progress, enlightenment and science; and for equal rights, whether woman or man, black or white. Everybody is against poverty, oppression, economic exploitation and religious obscurantism. These attitudes are now commonplace, and everyone would sign up for them when asked in a door-knock campaign. But, 100 years ago (and in some places as little as a few decades ago), all these aspirations were decidedly on the Left. In 1900, a European landowner would not have conceded equal rights to his labourers and would have considered it the God-given fate of his servants that they lived in bitter poverty. Today's moral standards have been defined by the Left.

This is not to say that the solutions, which the present-day Left has to offer, would advance these aspirations. Who would not want a world without poverty, without oppression, without privileges for the few; with equal opportunity for all? But it is dubious whether government regulations, bureaucratic guidance and the handing out of taxpayers' money can advance these values. Even people with a Left ideology are becoming sceptical about Statist patent solutions.

We have seen sufficient proof in the 20th century that central planning and the rule of Communist parties produce nothing but poverty, brutal oppression and, time and again, mass murder. As of the early 21st century, doubt also spreads about the utopia of the democratic Left, the welfare state. The annual surveys of economic freedom in the world regularly show the poor performance of social welfare states.<sup>1</sup> By contrast, the difference between rich and poor is least in market economies and where governments confine themselves to fostering expedient rules (institutions). The least regulated economies also do best with regard to other important indicators that reflect the aspirations of the Left: higher living standards among the relatively poorest quarter of the population, a higher level of education, and better health care.

The Left in affluent Western countries has become reactionary, trying to conserve the structures of the past. Once upon a time, the Left fought for radical change. Nowadays, they frown in sorrow about too much change and point to the risks. Technical progress? Thanks, but no thanks! Open borders for the wares from the Third World? Caution! More individual liberty? Heaven forbid! Fighting dictators? Not with us!

Oddly enough, the Left is resolutely opposed to the attempt by the United States and Britain to trigger a new democratic beginning among the despotic regimes in the Middle East. Was not the fight against oppressors and torturers once a Left cause? To be on the Left once meant to embrace progress, favour change and believe in a better tomorrow. What has shifted in their conception of the world and their identity? Indeed, is the Left still on the left?

An irrefutable indication of intellectual sclerosis is when methods are upheld instead of goals. When European countries deregulated

telecommunications, socialist politicians warned that pensioners and the unemployed would not be able to afford a telephone: capitalist rationalisation would destroy jobs in the industry. In reality, the costs plummeted, and numerous new jobs were created. These were outcomes that the Left should have welcomed, though they were created by liberal methods. Regulations, prohibitions, and subsidies have, by contrast, failed to bring about more 'social justice'. It is the opposite of 'socially just' when the salesgirl pays the taxes to subsidise the home of her boss. It is the opposite of 'social' when the factory worker has to contribute to financing the fee-free university studies of the manager's son. Once one gets fixated on specific methods and instruments, one arrives at absurd results. It is high time to ask whether the old policy concepts serve to promote the objectives and values that we all now share. Maybe the time has come for a new Left. The German socialist and friend of Marx and Engels, Karl Kautsky (1854-1938) once wrote: 'Should we see proof that private property in the means of production is the only way to set the proletariat and humankind as a whole free, then we must jettison socialism for the sake of realising the ultimate aims.'

We want to discuss why a few concepts that are nowadays considered Left-wing, are miles away from what Kautsky called the 'liberation of humankind'.

## **Farewell to Liberty:**

### **The Left lends moral support to dictators**

It is well known that Leftists have, time and again, supported criminal regimes. Since the end of the Cold War, this support has gained unexpected dimensions. Many Leftists now defend not only Leftist dictatorships, but all of them — and that is new.

Before we look at this phenomenon, we have to cast a short glance back. The most murderous despots of the 20th century got the fulsome praise of Western artists and intellectuals. Brecht and Neruda, the Webbs, Picasso and Chaplin, Harry Belafonte and Jean-Paul Sartre, the list goes on and on.... Hundreds of prominent figures and hundreds of less prominent ones imagined a land of promise behind the Iron Curtain. As late as the 1970s, German

radicals, who subsequently held top positions in the Greens Party and key government departments, were great admirers of Mao Zedong and Pol Pot.

Of course, there were always the others. The great schism between social democracy and communism made it clear that the Left majority remained firmly anchored to democracy. Socialists have defended freedom in historic situations when Conservatives and Liberals failed to stand up, for example when Hitler took power in 1933. They also stood in the frontline against Stalinism. West Berlin might well have been lost to Soviet dominance had it not been for Social Democrats such as Ernst Reuter, Kurt Schumacher, and Willy Brandt.

Since the 1980s, the anti-totalitarian commitment of the Social Democrats has been flagging. When the movement against stationing mid-range rockets in NATO countries began, which — as we now know — was steered from East Berlin, the Young Socialists of the day developed ever-closer contacts with German Democratic Republic (GDR) operatives. Before long, there were high-level dialogues between representatives of the German Social Democrats and the GDR regime. Leading German Social Democrats condemned the workers' movement in Poland; and when the population of the GDR rose, they remained to the very last steadfastly convinced of the sustainability of the dictatorship. They kept warning that no one should have any 'illusions'. History has proven them thoroughly wrong. Nonetheless, the young socialists of the 1980s persisted with what they called Realpolitik and the 'politics of disengagement'. Chancellor Gerhard Schröder's foreign policy was shaped by a close friendship with Russia's semi-democratic President Putin, and an amazing amount of blind trust in China's rulers.

For most of the 20th century, Social Democrat subservience and solidarity with the Communists were reserved for dictatorships of the Red variety. One was proud to be anti-fascist and full of contempt for right-wing oppressor regimes, always ready to join the fight.

The Left's most important and successful moral argument against the United States during the Cold War was US support for right-wing dictators. Successive Washington governments had fostered some sinister characters under US Secretary of State Cordell Hull's

motto: ‘He may be a son-of-a-bitch, but he is our son-of-a-bitch!’ — Mobutu in the Congo, Pinochet in Chile, Marcos in the Philippines and dozens more. After the collapse of the Soviet empire, US support for pro-American dictatorships dwindled rapidly. Some of them were sent packing by their own subjects. US support lined up more and more behind democratic opposition movements. After September 11th, US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice turned this into a political agenda, and US foreign policy is now quite explicit about spreading democracy and freedom. The terror regimes in Kabul and Baghdad were deposed. Undemocratic, though pro-American, regimes are increasingly cold-shouldered by Washington. Even embarrassing exceptions from this rule — Saudi Arabia and Egypt — now have to put up with regular criticism and admonition.

As soon as the US government withdrew its goodwill from right-wing dictators, the European Left turned it on. All of a sudden, fascists, theocrats and corrupt military hoonos were presented in a milder light, as long as they opposed US policies. Once the Left called for international solidarity, but now they emphasise the unconditional inviolability of national sovereignty, even for thugs who have already committed several genocides. Paul Berman, the US Left-liberal, writes:

The old-fashioned left used to be universalist — used to think that everyone, all over the world, would some day want to live according to the same fundamental values, and ought to be helped to do so. They thought this was especially true for people in reasonably modern societies with universities, industries, and a sophisticated bureaucracy — societies like the one in Iraq. But no more! Today, people say, out of a spirit of egalitarian tolerance: Social democracy for Swedes! Tyranny for Arabs! And this is supposed to be a left-wing attitude? By the way, you don’t hear much from the left about the non-Arabs in countries like Iraq, do you? The left, the real left, used to be the champion of minority populations — of people like the Kurds. No more! The left, my friend, has abandoned the values of the left — except for a few of us, of course.<sup>12</sup>

In his book *Terror and Liberalism*, Berman draws insightful parallels between the present situation and the 1930s. At that time, the French Socialist Party had a large, strictly pacifist minority. The socialist pacifists saw a danger for peace in France rearming against the German threat and preparing for a German attack. They fought bravely against anti-German *ressentiments* and argued for public sympathy for the German position. They tried to convince the French populace that the Nazis were not all that bad, indeed that they were right about quite a few things. Wasn't the Versailles Treaty unfair? Did Hitler not do the right thing by getting the jobless off the streets? Didn't the Jews have too much influence in Germany? Their tolerance and their love for peace made the pacifists blind to the state terror of the Nazi regime and its preparations for war — they much preferred to criticise their own government. When the German army later occupied France, many socialists became willing collaborators who supported the Nazi administration — all with the best of intentions, it goes without saying.

Democracies have never been as strong as they are today. By the end of the Second World War, the overwhelming majority of mankind still lived under dictatorships, monarchies and colonial governments. According to the most recent Freedom House survey, people in 122 nations elect their governments. This represents 64% of the world's countries — the highest number in the survey's 33-year history. And this is where the majority of the global population lives. Eighty-nine countries even have fully-fledged democracies with all basic liberties.<sup>3</sup> Thus, there are fewer and fewer grounds for allowing the dinosaurs of history to dictate the international agenda. In 2000, the 'Community of Democracies' was founded in Warsaw as a global initiative by democratic governments to spread democracy, freedom and human rights in and outside the UN. This sounds like a project in the best of genuine Left traditions: internationalist, democratic and future-oriented. Alas, the Left has shown hardly any interest in the project.

## **Farewell to Equality: The Left enhances the segregation of the better-off**

The political successes of Social Democracy in the 1960s and early 1970s produced a huge number of well-paid positions, mainly in the public sector. At the same time, technical change allowed the industrial workforce to shrink rapidly. As a consequence, the Left changed its thinking and attitudes fundamentally. Pyramid climbers who made it tend to think conservatively. New social movements, and later the rise of the Greens, acted as catalysts which accelerated the metamorphosis of the Social Democrat mainstream.

The class struggle had been as good as won. The workers had their own homes, their cars, their holiday trips; the trade unions had their wage cartel and much clout in the management of industry. So, the steadily expanding academic Left had to find a new client base which needed representing. Ideally, their target clientele had to be rather weak and immature. Best of all that — and different from the aspiring working class — they would not want to interfere with the schemes of the *avant garde*. This is how disadvantaged minorities, distant peoples, animals and trees became the focus of Left attention.

The changes were driven by a pronounced need for occupying the moral high ground, which has become a sign of social distinction. You belong if you display it; just as being a connoisseur of wine, the opera or designer furniture these days are essential ingredients in the Left lifestyle. A catering firm which has been successful in Ferrari Red circles in Germany is quaintly called *Red Gourmet Faction*. Like all new elites, the new-Left profiteers from the eco-social offensives for education, culture, redistribution and the environment feel a need to set themselves apart from the masses. They have to prove to themselves again and again that theirs are more noble motives than those of the plebs. Their contact with social reality is at best maintained through chats with cab drivers.

This strange phenomenon of an ‘anti-bourgeois bourgeoisie’ has turned yesterday’s taboos into the accepted norms of today. But the new intellectual landscape is as much interspersed with taboos as

the petty idyll of the Adenauer and Eisenhower years had been. In the cultural scene, only those who are let in by the gatekeepers who uphold the prevailing norms succeed. In Germany, the controllers nowadays occupy nearly the entire middle-management structure and many leading positions in the churches, the education system, publishing houses, the media, theatres and the music and film industries. German sociologist Gerhard Schulze has called them the 'priestly caste of professional standard setters and gatekeepers'.

Yet, many of the representatives of the new establishment still think they are rebels. Their credo is that the world is bad, and it is all the fault of capitalism. No one could ever deprive them of this belief. As Gerhard Schulze says: 'All is problematic, doubtful, relative, broken etc.' They are even incapable of recognising any criticism of their attitudes because they think they have a permanent and exclusive hold on all critical capacity.

The intellectuals of the 20th century idealised the 'proletarian' as noble, the standard bearer of the revolution. Today's Lefties look at the 'prols' with revulsion, watching them in reality shows on cable TV; they make sure that their designer children have no contact with the offspring of the lower classes. They have locked the stable gate to education behind themselves. And they do anything to keep it that way. One of the really effective means is their mental dress code. Those who want to belong to the new academic middle class have to display the Left mental outfit, just to ensure that one is not disturbed by outsiders.

Snobbishness is in again. The Lefties strive for higher things and are full of contempt for the material aspirations of the ordinary folk. The Ferrari Left has forgotten that their post-materialistic universe hovers above a material one in which the majority of people live their daily lives. They have lost their emotional connection to the ground level, which the great Social Democrats and union leaders of the past had in heaps. At all those theatre premieres and openings of art exhibitions, one simply does not encounter the unemployed and social-welfare recipients, nor those who work in the productive sector to feed the redistribution machine. These people have other concerns. Or they have no time.

The Left elite talks about the lower class with the same condescension as the big landowners once did about their servants. One's own intellectual and moral superiority is being celebrated whilst one laments the lack of refined culture among the 'prols'. Yet, it is the academic, the cultivated circles that regularly embrace the silliest nonsense and are spooked by each and every media-created hysteria. The German forests died only in editorial offices. The forest workers just shook their heads in disbelief. To see an abnormally cold winter as a sign of global warming also requires some pretty solid dialectic schooling. Only then does one find it reasonable that high petrol prices are a good thing and cheap food a negative. After September 11th, it took very little time before the chattering classes declared the event somehow a just revenge and highlighted the phallic dimensions of the Twin Towers. The less highly educated felt simply sorry for the people who had to jump out of the skyscraper windows. The *caffè latte* mob failed to realise during the 1990s that Muslim mass immigration might present a problem — in university circles, that was seen as quasi-fascist sentiment. Ordinary people, who had to share the neighbourhood with the new immigrants, saw what was coming much sooner and much more clearly.

Once, the Left acted as the 'critical conscience' of society. Now they pursue bourgeois ideals. Anyone who has arrived and wants to be culturally with it has to be against the neo-conservatives, against America and for paying deposits on bottles and drink cans. The intellectuals on the public payroll are agreed that everything in Western consumer society has to change radically — except, of course, their own privileges.

## **Farewell to Fraternity: The Left in defence of their privileges**

One of the classical Left criticisms of bourgeois society has been that equality before the law is no more than an empty formality. *De facto*, the poor are always at a legal disadvantage against the rich. This is why the fraternal redistribution of the national product has to make the poor richer and rich poorer. Only when everyone enjoys an almost equal living standard will we have social justice. All men then become brothers. The methods to achieve this end spanned from the expropriation of the means of production (that was the hard-core version) to progressive taxation and public welfare (soft-core fiscal socialism). To be on the Left meant to argue for the poor and the weak, to fight against the privileges of the more affluent. It meant to fight for the weak against the powerful, for the small and against the big end of town, for David and against Goliath. Nowadays, however, the Left increasingly defends the well off against the poor sods and the asset-rich against the penniless — whether in a material or a cultural sense.

Any softening of anti-dismissal legislation is attacked by combative union officials as ‘social devastation’ and the destruction of the ‘right to work’. In countries with little anti-dismissal protection, such as the United States or Switzerland, people find new jobs much faster than in Germany. And there are many fewer long-term unemployed. In the US, it is no personal failing to lose one’s job and it is much easier to find a new one. The theory is that rigid dismissal laws protect powerless workers against the arbitrary might of brutal bosses. The reality is that lethargic workers are protected from the competition of competent job seekers. Who in all of this is the weak and who wields the power?

If you want a lesson about the iniquitous side effects of excessive security, take a look at public broadcasting. In Germany, viewers have to pay for TV licenses, and the beneficiaries are immediately visible when one looks at the architecture. Some stations have administrative buildings that are much bigger than the studios. Those who have wangled a job with radio or television enjoy nearly the

lifetime tenure of civil servants and can hardly be sacked. As it would be unaffordable to offer this benighted status to everybody, only a small part of the employees are allowed to get it. Most hire out their services as free contractors, without being able to claim any privileges at all. The public-sector unions fight valiantly for maintaining and enhancing the privileges of the tenured *priviligiensia*. Over time, two classes have emerged, quasi civil servants and day labourers. This is rock solid discrimination, created in the name of the rights of employees.

The Left of the 1980s liked to carry on about the coming post-material age. The welfare state, so they said then, had eliminated poverty at home. The great conflicts of the future were expected in soft policy areas, such as protecting the environment, gender politics or lifestyle issues. Erich Fromm's bestseller *To Have or to Be?* was at the time declared as the philosophical guidebook to the future by Social Democrats such as Oskar Lafontaine, who was considered particularly modern.<sup>4</sup> But the supposed post-material age did not last long. After the fall of the Wall, the misery under Soviet socialism became plain obvious, and solid material concerns returned to the political agenda.

As of 2005, it is not yet a matter of worrying about the daily bread, but many are again concerned about the cheese to top it off. And where material conflicts are being fought over, one can put Fromm aside. Instead, one should again take a look at Marx, who interpreted history as a sequence of class struggles. Class theory can offer useful insights when people fight over the economic foundations of a nation. After all, an arduous class struggle is currently being fought in Germany. It rages not between workers and capitalists, but between two camps whose economic interests confront each other at least as fiercely as those on both sides of the worker-capitalist divide. It is the battle between the productive and the public sector. Workers and employees in private enterprise belong to the productive sector, as do businesspeople and contractors. The public sector comprises all who are on the payroll of the federal, state and local governments or receive their pay under centrally fixed pay deals with *quangos*. In between are big business and the big banks, who tend to lean

towards government, thanks to complex inter-dependencies with the state.

The Left has long lost its roots among the workers, but is tied firmly to the public sector whose interests they represent with decisive, battle-hardened resolve. It is no coincidence that the public sector union has become the champion of the otherwise flagging union movement. Some 5,000,000 people work in this sector. Civil servants are massively over-represented in the parliaments, whereas people from the productive sector can hardly be found there. The producers form one third of society, but bankroll all and everything: the pensions, health care, education, the dole and welfare hand-outs, as well of course as public service pay. The core of the productive sector is small business. They pay most of the taxes, offer most jobs and apprenticeships and produce most inventions and innovations. Those in the public sector are ignorant of how the productive sphere works; they do not understand how it ticks. Like all ruling classes, the public sector tries to secure and expand its position through strict anti-dismissal laws, higher taxes and growing public debt — exactly as Marx's analysis would predict. The Left now fights a class war from above, ironically still using the Marxist propaganda clichés. Many a pronouncement of the public-sector union, which aims at no more than securing the privileges of the tenured and well-rewarded, reads as if it argued for lifting the starvation wages of Peruvian mine workers.

It was a brilliant move in the class war from above to attain the intellectual high ground by tying in the cultural and artistic elites (here it pays to move from Marx to Gramsci). Out of that corner, there is almost no criticism of the ruling class since all artists and 'cultural workers' are used to being fed from the public trough. Materially well-provided cultural mandarins are staging the class struggles of yesteryear, since they are incapable of comprehending what is going on today — not that they wanted to. Here, too, Marx offers a convincing explanation. Local theatres, academies of art and popular TV crime series simulate critical consciousness by rewarming old clichés. The public service applauds. And the productive sector pays the subsidies.

## **Farewell to Internationalism: The Left cements national borders and third-world problems**

Books such as *The Globalisation Trap* (by Martin and Schumann of Germany), *The Terror of Economics* (by Forrester of France) or *The End of Work* (by Rifkin of the United States) can be found on every Leftist's bookshelf.<sup>5</sup> An enthralled public read in horror about the cruelties of the global economy. Bosses and speculators are inflicting the plague of free trade on the world. They take the jobs from the workers in the old industrial countries the more ruthlessly to exploit the Third World. In the process, social standards, environmental protection, culture and all that is beautiful, good and noble are being sacrificed. So much for the theory.

But from what precisely do the dyed-in-the-wool anti-globalisers in the unions, government offices and media want to protect humankind? And what is the economic process that is called globalisation? Let us quote two experts who should be beyond Left-wing doubts.

The bourgeoisie has through its exploitation of the world market given a cosmopolitan character to production and consumption in every country. To the great chagrin of reactionaries, it has drawn from under the feet of industry the national ground on which it stood. All old-established national industries have been destroyed and are daily being destroyed. They are dislodged by new industries, whose introduction becomes a life and death question for all civilised nations, by industries that no longer work up indigenous raw material, but raw material drawn from the remotest zones; industries whose products are consumed not only at home, but in every quarter of the globe.

This is what Marx and Engels wrote in the *Communist Manifesto*.<sup>6</sup> They were quite content to add: 'The bourgeoisie, by the rapid improvement of all instruments of production, by the immensely facilitated means of communication, draws all, even the most backward, nations into civilisation.'

These two revolutionaries welcomed the process. *The Communist Manifesto* is counting the emerging former colonies, as well as modern innovative industry among those who gain from the global play. Yet, today the slogans of the anti-globalisation Attac movement attract widespread support in those countries that have become rich thanks to capitalism and free markets.

Meanwhile, a new breed of revolutionary is gathering in the world's poor regions. Those who really want to find pro-capitalist activists will be positively surprised in the slums of Johannesburg, Lima or Bombay. Many Third World citizens are convinced of the merits of free markets and free trade — quite in contrast to their well-meaning, self-appointed guardians from the West. A recent Pew Center survey in 44 countries revealed, for example, that the absolute majority of Africans has a positive attitude to free trade. Yet, only a minority of Europeans shares that opinion.<sup>7</sup>

A capitalist grass-roots revolution is under way in the shantytowns of former British colonies, the *favelas* of Brazil, and the *bidonvilles* of French ex-colonies. It takes your breath away with its dynamism and creativity. The poor have become risk takers, compared to whom many a European job seeker looks like a helpless babe in arms. They have decided to take the redistribution of wealth into their own hands and to storm the bastions of the rich as small entrepreneurs. Street traders, small farmers and job seekers experience daily that it is not greedy entrepreneurs who complicate their lives, but kleptocratic rulers and parasitic bureaucrats. Those new revolutionaries do not get their instructions from Che Guevara or Mao. Instead, they demand more markets, opportunities for all, and secure property titles. These are frequently denied the poorest: for example, even a property title to a self-built hut. Hardly anyone in Europe or North America is aware of the new generation of liberal intellectuals from Africa, South America and Asia. Instead, Left elites pass around old-fashioned ideologues such as Arundhati Roy or Vandana Shiva, who supposedly serve to give us a social conscience. But they have no support among the poor in their home countries.

The market economy must emerge from the very bottom up. This is, for example, the opinion of South Africa's libertarian intellectual

pioneer Themba Sono. This former Marxist has therefore become an active pro-capitalist. He refuses to promise the people a society in which all are equal. But he demands a system that hinders no one to improve his fate. ‘Unfortunately, so many people fall for the promises of politicians,’ he says. ‘They want to believe in the fairy tale of the good government which achieves social justice. But the politicians only serve themselves. Take a look at Zimbabwe. This shows how the politics of populist illusion ends. What is the meaning of capitalism?’ he asks rhetorically. ‘It means that everyone has the right to invest in the hope of a profit. All life is a form of investment, irrespective of what we do.’<sup>8</sup> Sono wants the poor, too, to get admission tickets to the capitalist system, namely property rights to their meagre possessions, the right to start private initiatives where governments fail and the right to take a job, even if it does not conform to the norms dictated by the unions. Those denied such admission tickets will always remain at the bottom of the pile.

How — mind you, with the best of intentions — people can be denied life opportunities is shown in the following example: the Reebok company stopped all purchases of sports goods from a Thai supplier in order to pre-empt attacks by Left activists against a 72-hour work week. It mattered not that the workers wanted to work longer, not shorter, hours. Nor did it matter that their pay was better than the minimum wage and that workplace safety and health standards were far above what local employers were normally offering. So, 400 people lost their jobs. Now that was really fair! *The Economist* called it ‘ethically disemployed’. Themba Sono accuses the Left of having no idea about the real worries of the poor. ‘The celebrities among the anti-globalisers jet set between the capitals of North America and Europe, spending their lives in conference halls of five star hotels.’ He has a message for the ‘Nyet Set’: ‘Leave us alone. Stop exporting your superseded ideologies.’<sup>9</sup>

Julius Nyerere, who ruined Tanzania with his socialist *ujamaa* village experiment, is still a hero of the Left, as is Che Guevara who did much to ruin Cuba’s economy. After all, hat counts for the Left are not the deeds but the words. What is really strange about its vociferations about world poverty is that they systematically pass over

the success stories in overcoming poverty and hunger. In Southeast Asia over the past two decades, one could observe how mass poverty dwindles. The new wealth is not only spreading among the upper classes, but workers and farmers are also better off. As recently as the 1970s, the Club of Rome prophesied mass starvation with millions of deaths for Asia. And now Malaysia, Hong Kong & Co. are taking the markets off their former colonial masters. They, too, had once been as poverty-stricken as Tanzania still is. Economic progress is possible. The Condemned of the Earth are now catching up — alas, with capitalist methods. And this is, in all likelihood, why the Western Left doesn't want to talk about the Asian ascendancy.

A second liberation of the ex-colonies is underway. More and more African, Asian and South American intellectuals are now freeing themselves from their Left guardians in Western governments and trade unions, asking them critical questions. In our day, solidarity with the Third World can only mean that we play fair when the competition with these countries increases. A Christmas donation for the poor coffeepicker of Nicaragua? Always gladly tossed in the hat. But when his daughter wants to leave the plantation to become a software designer: Heavens no! When cheap and excellent computers, textiles and cars suddenly appear on European markets, produced in countries that had previously fulfilled the role of willing buyers of European products, all international solidarity abruptly evaporates. Then the bosses of the senescent industries walk hand-in-hand with the union bosses. Bread for the world is OK, but the cheese remains reserved for us!

Many interest groups are jittery about globalisation, and with good reason. The old industries of Europe and North America, the subsidy grabbers and sclerotic big corporations, which are mollycoddled by our governments, want everything to remain the same. They have an inkling that somewhere out there in the Third World, there are dynamic, motivated and hard-working people who might relieve them of their inherited markets. The Left have become the useful and unsuspecting lobbyists for them.

The Left, while fighting against the opening of global markets, is demanding debt forgiveness for the rulers of poor countries.

Together with the churches and aid professionals, they managed to get the governments of the rich industrial countries to come to the party. Their ceaseless cries for more development aid have also been successful. International pop stars, too, are promoting the idea that debt cancellations and development handouts can abolish poverty. This conviction has meanwhile become part of the intellectual and moral vision of many in Europe and North America.

Yet, the representatives of the democratic opposition in Africa are highly sceptical about this kind of charity. As they see it, debt forgiveness and official aid only cement the rule of thieving dictators. 'If the industrial countries really want to help Africans,' says economist James Shikwati, 'They should finally terminate this awful aid. The countries that have collected the most aid are also the ones that are in worst shape.'<sup>10</sup> Ugandan journalist Andrew Mwela agrees: 'All that aid does is to conceal the incompetence of our despots.'<sup>11</sup> In any event, Western generosity rarely reaches those for whom it is intended. Uganda had its debts cancelled in 2000. Half of the additional aid promptly vanished into murky channels. Four years later, Uganda had more debt than ever before. When Great Britain raised aid to Malawi, the government promptly ordered 39 new Mercedes S-Class limousines. More than half the budget in quite a few African countries consists of aid. They are spending the other half shamelessly on the military and prestige projects. In many cases, economic growth plummeted when aid rose. The ruling kleptocratic cliques are the worst burden on the poor of Africa. Those in the West who help them to obtain debt relief and development aid are only distributing the money of the working people of Europe to the super-rich of Africa.

## **Farewell to Anti-Fascism: The Left subscribes increasingly to far right slogans**

Anyone who places the pamphlets of the Left anti-globalisers and the neo-Nazis side-by-side will immediately detect much overlap. The slogans of both movements are increasingly not only similar, but identical. ‘Work, not profit!’ is the catch cry of the German neo-Nazis. Horst Mahler, an anti-Western activist who moved from the Leftist Red Army Faction to the neo-Nazi Party, typifies the Left-Right convergence. He declared *The Globalisation Trap*, the cult book of the anti-globalisers, ‘a must read’. He opined: ‘The enemy of all peoples of the world is an octopus of anonymously, globally interwoven speculative capital.’ That might also be read on any of the handbills produced by the Attac mob. If the anti-Western movements of the Left and the Right were to integrate, they would not need to change their course. Both already use indiscriminately any ideological line that can be used against free trade, open borders, America and Israel.

None of this is of course new. Between the wars, Communists, Fascists and National Socialists preached the merits of closing the borders to alien products, foreign investors and immigrants. They were rather successful because national-conservative elites shared their misguided views. International economic integration, which had been disrupted by the First World War, was nearly brought to a complete halt, with the consequence of economic crises and poverty. Towards the end of the Weimar Republic, Red-Brown cooperation culminated in joint demonstrations and actions by the German Communist and the National Socialist parties. Moscow Centre approved; and a few years later, upright Leftists stood by in horror as the Hitler-Stalin Pact was signed. The present situation is far less dramatic. But, like then, protectionist misconceptions, the belief in top-down regulation and the defamation of all that is American are shared in Red and Brown circles.

That the current nationalist-socialist fraternisation is more than a bizarre phenomenon among radical fringe groups became apparent in the middle of 2005 when the East German post-Communists

formed the new 'Left Party', with disappointed West German trade unionists, Social Democrats and Left sectarians. The two leaders, Oskar Lafontaine and Gregor Gysi, declared immediately that they were out to attract 'mised voters' from the extreme Right. They are appealing to the yearning for a paternalistic state, which offers its citizens sustenance, protection and security by sheltering them from foreign influences. Lafontaine shamelessly sang from the national song sheet to attract voters from the Right fringe, demanding that German jobs be reserved for Germans. This earned him the prompt acclaim of the leaders of the neo-Nazi Party. Some of them invited their members to join the Left Party.

Political observers of Germany have long watched the Right flank, always on the lookout for a German Le Pen or Haider. They should have turned their heads every now and then, for now we have him. He emerged from the Left corner. That of course raised his chances of a hearing in the media. We now have an integration of what belongs together, a movement built on fear of the future and on resentment of Anglo-Saxon capitalism and technical progress.

Their shared values are not confined to social and economic policy. 'For peace! Against US wars!' could be read on last year's election campaign posters of the neo-Nazis. Both wings, however, confined their love of peace to attacking Western military actions. By contrast, they display deep sympathy for Islamic terror. Exactly like the neo Nazis, many on the Left consider terror as a defence of the Islamic-Arab identity against Western capitalism and cultural imperialism. Oskar Lafontaine wants to grant the clerico-fascist regime of the Iranian mullahs a right to nuclear weapons, since Israel also has such weapons. The fact that Iran wants to wipe out Israel, and not vice versa, does not seem to faze them.

It has been a good tradition of the Left to insist on democratic freedom. Yet, the only Mideastern country where such freedom exists is being defamed and denigrated in the name of 'anti-imperialism'. Israel is the only country with free elections, a free press, free trade unions and all other fundamental liberties in a region where human rights are being trampled by religious leaders, military thugs, civilian dictators and corrupt sheiks. In Israel, women are by and large treated

as equals; lesbians and homosexuals face no official discrimination; the judiciary is independent; the law liberal. These are normally very important achievements in the eyes of the academic Left, but they do not earn Israel any sympathies. To the contrary. Instead, Yassir Arafat, the murderous, dictatorial and corrupt Palestinian leader, became the idol of the anti-globalisers and peace demonstrators.

Berlin sociologist Michael Holmes wrote an essay about the odd sympathies of many Leftists. In it he asked:

Why does no one read the charter of Hamas or the declarations of El Fatah, in which these organisations declare their anti-Semitic objectives openly? Why is every suicide attack used in Europe for even sharper condemnations of Israel? Why do Germans not see the connections between September 11 and their own anti-Semitic history? Why were the biggest anti-Semitic marches in Europe since 1945 organised by the enemies of globalisation?<sup>12</sup>

Historians and Islam experts have documented that the central pattern of the National Socialist perception of America and their anti-Semitism have been taken over by present-day Islamists. The National Socialist regime has supported Islamism not only through weapons deliveries and diplomatic support; it also shares the core of its ideology.<sup>13</sup> Holmes writes: 'Not only is all that is Jewish evil in the eyes of the Nazis and the *jihadists*. All that is evil is Jewish. And the fight against the US is fed by that same anti-Semitic world view.'<sup>14</sup> Regrettably, a non-negligible part of the Left is closing its eyes and glorifies the terrorists as anti-imperialist resistance fighters.

This is not quite new. During the student protests of the 1960s, anti-Semitism, disguised as anti-Zionism, was rife. Loud mouths such as Dieter Kunzelmann kept swearing about the 'shit Jews'. German Red Army terrorists got their training from Arab Jew haters, placed a bomb in the Jewish Community Centre in Berlin and abducted an Israeli passenger plane. 'The German 68 generation resembled their parents in the most miserable of ways', remarked historian Götz Aly.<sup>15</sup>

The low point of Left confusion is marked by their understanding attitude towards Palestinian and other terrorists, the congresses and demos they share with *jihadists*, and their blindness to Islamists' open declarations of anti-human aims and methods. What started as anti-fascist pathos intended to strengthen the Left identity has now degenerated into folklore. The Jews murdered in the past were used to demonstrate one's noble sentiments. The living are considered disturbers of the peace.

**Farewell to the Enlightenment:  
Religious obscurantism, esoterics and conspiracy theories  
are thriving in the left's slipstream**

Leftists tend to see themselves as champions of social criticism and emancipation. The traditional Left inventory contained the freeing of thought from theological-metaphysical obscurantism. A socialist of the early days in the last century would presumably tear his hair out about the present-day Left.

Post-Communists, Social Democrats, Greens, Alternative Democrats — or whatever other label they travel under — have over recent decades said farewell, step by step, to the Enlightenment. They now embrace a romantic counter-Enlightenment. Instead of improving the world by critical, rational analysis, they now 'believe'. Esoterics and established religion are now of equal merit for acquiring knowledge, as they adhere to the creed of an inner, divine equilibrium in Nature. The new spirituality is being propagated at church conventions, in colleges of adult education, on the radio and television.

This form of retro-piety meanders somewhere between the Dalai Lama and the Walldorf schools, Greenpeace and the PETA organisation. Academic circles adopt new religious currents, anthroposophy, Buddhism and esoteric beliefs in their manifold variants. The most influential and widespread such variety is ecologism. Like Christianity, ecologism is infused with the anticipation of an end time which one has to prepare for by doing without and by penance. One can detect these postures in the

scriptures of the eco movement. Eternal life has its contemporary equivalent in unending cyclic loops, and penance is done by paying a bottle deposit. The Last Judgement has been replaced by the climate catastrophe, and the church steeples by windmills.

German children's books, textbooks, video clips, early evening television, government museums and party programmes have long been suffused with the ecological dogma. It has become an integral part of the public language. Nature is good, man is bad. And if man does not obey, he is threatened with the 'revenge of Nature'. The angry deity of Nature demands placating rituals; this explains the dedication with which many Germans sort through their rubbish. The Natural is pure, unspoilt, holy. What is man-made is sinful, dirty, spoilt. In our pop culture, the whales and dolphins have taken over the role of the angels, as beneficent and wise higher beings who convey messages to us mortals.

The community of believers is now united, as once they were around Holy Communion, in candle vigils, sit-downs and fundraiser concerts. As in all religions, food fetishes guarantee the delimitation of the elites from the impure heathens. 'Bio' has become the new *halal* and *kosher*, a mental construct to assist in reasserting one's creed in everyday life. Though there is no proof — despite many attempts to find one — that genetically modified food is in any way harmful or that food produced according to the guidelines of the eco organisations is healthier, 'bio-eco' and 'organic' are in. Salvation can come only in the 'ecological circular flow', which lifts individual mortality into an eternal circle of Nature.

There are no reasoned grounds for many modern fears, and the divisions between justified concerns and modern humbug have long disappeared. We were informed of supposedly terrible dangers from mobile phones, tooth fillings and plastic toys. At a time when fundamentalist men of God inflict blood baths all around the world, one should probably be grateful for religions that do not inflict losses of human lives. But ecologism, too, has lost its innocence. It is meanwhile costing human lives, indeed very many. Every 30 seconds someone dies of malaria. Leftist eco elites have to shoulder co-responsibility for this, as they got politicians to

declare a shortsighted ban on DDT, against all reason and all social consciousness. This valuable instrument in the fight against malaria was used in minute doses around human habitations, where it did not harm birds — different from its intensive use in agriculture.

Alas, the DDT ban is not the only example. The list of eco crusades at the expense of other humans is growing longer and longer. It reaches from the fight against gene technology, with all its potential of helping the poor in the Third World, to the boycotts of vaccinations, so that many contagious diseases are spreading again. Leftist campaigners impede much medical research that requires animal experiments. They are undermining the solutions to present and future human problems with religious zeal.

You are with it if you look down upon the health achievements of modern medicine. The fact that life expectancy has doubled over the past 200 years is shrugged off. Not so long ago, polio, measles and other serious, often deadly illnesses were an ever-present threat. Hardly anyone considers their elimination through pharmaceuticals and technology as a triumph. Even those who rely on therapies based on science, logic and controllable experiment now use the defamatory term ‘conventional school medicine’. It is considered a conspiracy of greedy men in white coats, who cure the symptoms of their patients with ‘hard chemistry’ and ‘cold technology’. Science and technology are suspect; esoteric methods are the salvation. What once began as a justified critique of mass medicine is now often turned into a pseudo-religious veneration of miracle healers and homeopaths. Gurus who once only had the run of the esoteric corner now dominate the public health debate. Apparent humbug is now called a ‘Holistic Medicine’ or ‘Soft Healing’.

Most political minds underestimate the power of magic. Like Left-wing sociologist Adorno, they think that ‘occultism is the meta physics of the idiots’. But idiocy does not automatically mean weakness or that it will stay on the fringes. Such ideas can be mightily influential when they conquer the centre of society. German author Jutta Ditfurth has to be thanked for having analysed the esoteric scene and its political ramifications years ago. She showed how obscurantist world models were spreading throughout the eco scene

and other social movements. And whereas the dark flowers of the occult used to be picked up by the nationalist Right, much of it is now absorbed on the frayed edges of a disoriented Left.

Over recent years, the contempt for enlightened ideas and value relativism of some on the Left has been spreading beyond the eco and the esoteric spheres. Considerable numbers now busy themselves to present the anti-Enlightenment Islamo-fascists as harmless. This is sometimes done in the crudest of fashions. In record time, an entire genre of conspiracy literature has emerged. It would have us believe that a conniving club of neo-cons in the back rooms of the White House is steering everything that happens in the world. What started as a sinister conspiracy theory of a few hundred freaks has now become the belief of hundreds of thousands of ordinary citizens. Acceptance may have been enhanced by the fact that the neo-cons come from the US East coast. It all is reminiscent of the 'Wise Men of Zion', and the authors that now write this stuff are serving a growth market. Renowned publishers and the media give those false, self-righteous and resentful allegations wide exposure. Their success only demonstrates the extent to which the esoteric boom of the past 20 years has spread this nonsense among the people. It is often the same people who mutter about the 'influence of Washington' and in the next moment carry on about the power of crystals, energy water or some stellar ascendancy.

### **Farewell to Progress: The Left blocks change and new technology**

At the end of the 1970s, the Greens managed to mould arch-conservative and Left positions into an apocalyptic worldview. Anti-capitalist ideologues and conservative enemies of progress met at protests against nuclear power and formed the Green Party. The new pessimism about the future soon infected Social Democracy and brought about its opportunistic Greening. What had been a demand for progress and reform metamorphosed into the Green cyclical philosophy.

Long ago, Social Democrat transport ministers promised all citizens easy access to nearby motorways. The car and individual mobility have instead become a favourite target of cultural

criticism. The Left's farewell to industrial and technical progress is demonstrated most clearly by their attitudes to nuclear power. What once was unreserved advocacy has become uncompromising opposition to the nuclear power industry.

The last innovation the Left welcomed was colour TV. Since then, every new technology has been immediately blocked, unless each and every risk could be completely eliminated. The angst-laden concept of the 'precautionary principle' has become the central icon in the Leftist discourse about the future. 'Sustainability' has replaced the concept of open evolution. The future can at best be imagined as an energy-saving variant of the present. Germany's Red-Green federal government boasted openly about getting rid of all nuclear plants. In Left intellectual circles, the idea that the future might be even better than the present is considered as a totally crazy utopia.

This point is clear when they discuss the potential that science and technology might offer. This is a topic that a present-day Leftist would rather avoid. When the computer revolution is creating new jobs, catalytic converters clean the air, and gene technology increases the harvest, the Leftists sit on their sofas, folding their arms and look aggrieved. Progress must only come from social revolution, never from technology.

Instead, they act out a negativist kind of Adventism that has been knitted together from pieces of Marxian pauperisation theory and ecological end-game scenarios. Whatever happens, we are led closer to the unavoidable abyss. To support this view, they shamelessly change the arguments. Workers may become wealthy. BUT the Third World is impoverished! The Third World is catching up. BUT the environment! The environment is becoming cleaner. BUT the climate catastrophe looms! Somehow, everything will end in tears. Dan Diner, the historian and erstwhile activist of the Socialist Bureau, once remarked that 'what gathers on the Left are people who cannot think straight. They continually depict worst-case scenarios, panic and become more and more radical because they have begun to believe in their prophecies of disaster.'<sup>16</sup>

When computers became affordable in the 1980s, the new technology was being discussed from two angles: computers are

job killers and therefore extremely anti-social. And computers pave the way for the Orwellian surveillance of all citizens. The Green Party consequently decided to boycott computers — well, at least for a while. When mobile phones spread, the number one topic was the radiation danger. The triumph of the internet led above all to fears that pornography and Nazi propaganda would inundate us all. Reproductive medicine? Frankenstein researchers are intent on cloning humans. Stem cell research? Humans are to be cannibalised as spare parts. Plant gene technology? Monster tomatoes! For the past 10 years, gene technology has been nobbled in Europe with the most absurd of arguments. And no one talks about farmers from India to Argentina having planted improved varieties on millions of hectares without any harm whatever to humans or nature.

Affordable and healthy food for the masses once was an important demand of social revolutionaries. Thus, Friedrich Engels postulated the ‘democratisation of meat consumption’. He would be more than a little amazed today. At the start of the 21st century, Left spirits are demanding 100% purity, whatever it costs, not bulk for the masses. Green ministers and so-called consumer advocates are agitating against cheap food in supermarkets. The caviar Left looks down their collective noses full of contempt for popular chain stores such as Aldi, and they present their hostility as proof of their social responsibility and ecological high-mindedness.

Never in human history could more people buy hygienic, cheap and nice-tasting foodstuffs as in our system of specialised, high-tech mass production. Never before have more people been able to afford cheap fruit thanks to Aldi & Co – a huge contribution to public health. And from where on earth do consumer advocates get the idea that canned and deep-frozen food, or modern preservation means must be condemned? The new technologies have ensured that food today is healthier than in the olden times when many thousands died of food that had spoilt or become poisonous because of mould and botulism.

We have enjoyed impressive nutritional improvements thanks to technical progress and growing wealth. An average European of 100 years ago would today feel like he was in Paradise. Why are

the Lefties not able to welcome this? The answer is the envy of failed ‘people’s educators’ as well as a deep aversion amongst the cultural elites against all that is egalitarian and part of mass culture. The Refined, the Cultivated, the Educated seek to set themselves apart from the real-world barbarians who shop at Aldi’s and dine at McDonalds. These people are television addicts, readers of the popular press, and mass tourists and should be treated with utter contempt, albeit packaged in a wrapper of nannyish caring. This attitude is behind the furore with which they try to make everything that the masses enjoy more expensive: beer in cans and flights to Mallorca, petrol and junk food.

This is precisely where the French intellectual Leftie José Bové fits into the picture. He bought himself a herd of goats and has since acted as a farmers’ tribune. Together with a few fellow crims from the radical *Farmers Confederation*, he simply trashed a McDonalds restaurant in France. ‘The Right wingers hate McDonalds because they have outdone the National Socialist idea of the simple, nutritious Sunday stew. The Left hate McDonalds because they have realised the old demand of the workers movement that the working class should have access to the meat pots of the bourgeoisie and a right to eat in well-aired, well-lit restaurants.’ This is what Richard Herzinger and Hannes Stein wrote in their book about the millennial offensive of the anti-Westerners.

Bové became an icon of the anti-globalisation movement as a defender of rural interests. But the arguably best symbiosis between social critique and gourmet indulgence has been managed by the Italian communist journal *Il Manifesto*. Its food supplement *Gambero Rosso* (Red Lobster) has become a leading foodie magazine, which now far outsells the original paper.

## Endnotes

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- <sup>15</sup> G. Aly, 'Explodierender Hass' (Explosion of hatred), *Die Welt*, 16 July, 2005.
- <sup>16</sup> Dan Diner quoted by R. Herzinger (2002), in his article 'Prophet auf leisen Sohlen' ('Prophet treading on silent soles'), *Die Zeit*, no. 49.
- <sup>17</sup> R. Herzinger and H. Stein, *Endzeitpropheten oder die Offensive der Antiwestler* (Millennial Prophets or the Offensive of the Anti-Westerners) (Reinbek, Germany: Rowohlt, 1995), 24-25.





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"Liberty, Equality, Fraternity" is the French motto which came about around the time of the french revolution. Liberty represents freedom, a word that has many meanings; firstly it can stand for being able to make ones own decisions freely and having the opportunity to be able to express ones own beliefs without fear (I could continue thus for a while but I'm sure you get the idea). To be physically and/or legally free is different, and involves being free from confinement servitude or forced labor. Equality can stand for being equal in law and so to maintain a sameness of rules,