

INTRODUCTION: THREE DAYS IN BRUSSELS ...

BIRGIT DAIBER & ROLAND KULKE
RLS OFFICE, BRUSSELS
DECEMBER 2009

In October 2009, the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation, the World Forum for Alternatives and the Transnational Institute invited a number of important leftist intellectuals and activists from around the world to Brussels for three days to discuss alternatives to the global crisis. The preparatory work for this Conference took more than six months. The participants from North and Latin America, from eastern and western Europe, from the Maghreb and from sub-Saharan Africa, from India and from China submitted their position and background papers early, which enabled them to form the basis for a synopsis. This was in turn made accessible to everyone prior to the Conference, allowing them to prepare for the debates. Thus, the attempt was made not only to gather unilateral statements, but also to really enable a common debate at the meeting itself.

The goal of the Conference was to reveal the causes of the crisis and to discuss strategies for overcoming it. The crisis was seen as an opportunity to overcome the destructive capitalist mode of production. Five different dimensions of the crisis were central to the debates:

- The necessary transformation of the international economic system
- Food sovereignty and agricultural development
- The role of the state and the social movements in the policy of transformation
- The ecological question
- Ideas for a world beyond the crisis: Continuation of crisis capitalism or post-capitalism?

The results of the discussions at the conference were adopted under the title the Brussels Perspectives and translated into all major world languages. This call is addressed to all progressive people, to fight together against the destruction of human and natural resources caused by the capitalist crisis.

As a follow-up to the Three Days of Brussels, a series of activities dedicated to the development of transformative projects which open up future perspectives is planned by the three organisers. At the same time, we will continue to work on global alternative networking. In the upcoming period, the World Forum for Alternatives will devote special attention to the development and propagation of a universal charter of the common assets of humankind.

We are herein transmitting to you the Brussels Declaration of the Conference in all major world languages, as well as a synopsis of contributions of the participants and the Report of the Conference. We would like to request that you disseminate the Brussels Declaration in your networks.

THE WORLD CRISIS - AND BEYOND

INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON ALTERNATIVES AND TRANSFORMATION PATHS TO OVERCOME THE REGIME OF CRISIS-CAPITALISM, 28 OCT. – 1 NOV. 2009 in BRUSSELS, ROSA LUXEMBURG FOUNDATION, WORLD FORUM FOR ALTERNATIVES, AND TRANSNATIONAL INSTITUTE

BUILDING A NEW GLOBAL SOLIDARITY

BRUSSELS PERSPECTIVES

We, the signatories of this declaration, as intellectuals and activists from the Global South and the Global North, met in Brussels in the midst of an historic upheaval and severe crisis. National governments are rescuing capitalism and restoring neoliberalism, yet it is not too late for radical intervention. We wish to inspire new paradigms of social relations and of relations to nature, and so we are proposing elements for alternative systems at all levels based on a new global solidarity. Let us concentrate on people's needs and thus fight increasing poverty and pauperisation, control and downsize the financial sector, and struggle for climate justice, reclaim the commons and stop the wars. The people must decide. The entanglement of ecological, economic and social crises is structural and urgently requires action to be taken.

The crisis is over, they say.

No. The world is in the midst of an historical upheaval, although looking at the G-20, the European Union and partly even the UN, it seems as if it's only a question of minor re-arrangement. Real change is not in sight. Instead, the financial market bubble is being followed by a political bubble.

They try to restore neoliberal dominance and the logic of crisis-capitalism. Yes, they do – and, in respect of the global power structures, we must confess: Yes, they can.

Global capitalism has dragged the world into a severe crisis. The crisis is accompanied by the ongoing plundering of the planet's natural and energy resources, foremost in the South, imminent climate collapse, food crises with its devastating results like resulting hunger, poverty and migration. Moreover, the world faces growing social inequalities and deepening class division, along with the growing power of transnationals, wars and a tendency to authoritarian solutions. All of these various forms of crises are the consequences of a logic shaped by capitalism, patriarchy, imperialism, (neo)colonialism, militarisation and the exploitation of humans and nature. This logic should be replaced or the globe and humankind will face further pervasive conflicts.

NEW PARADIGMS

It is time for radical interventions. This means designing a vision connected to concrete projects of change with a clear perspective of transformation to solidarity societies. The most important goals are: rescuing the earth, stopping warfare, overcoming starvation and poverty, and achieving social equality and full emancipation.

Throughout the world numerous social and political movements and many local initiatives are organizing resistance and constructing new paradigms. The main requirements for human life on the planet include: priority of the needs of each person on the planet in a production process controlled by the people; reversal of the exploitative relations to nature to relations of respect as a source of life; and full democracy in all social relations and political, economic and cultural institutions. This also means equality for women in all sectors of the societies. Multiculturalism will give the possibility to all cultures and knowledge to contribute to the world vision and to the ethics necessary for transformation.

The struggle for transformation implies connecting and strengthening the social and political movements worldwide. Since the call of the Zapatistas and the emergence of the global movement of movements in Seattle, protest and resistance has been growing at all levels. Yet it remains fragmented. Nevertheless there are encouraging examples: the landless and peasant movements, women's and indigenous movements, social justice movements, workers movements and initiatives for decent work, immigrant and refugee movements, movements for climate justice, for paying back the debt to the South and, last but not least, for peace.

ALTERNATIVES

Let us concentrate on the needs and aspirations of the people. As first steps we demand: the immediate and radical redistribution of wealth from private owners to the peoples of the South, to the lower classes globally as well as to the public sphere – 75 % less wealth in the hands of the rich and the super-rich. We won't pay for the crisis and the ensuing new national debts. These demands may initially be met by means of heavy taxation on fortunes, corporate profits, personal high incomes, and inheritances as well as financial and currency transactions. The debt incurred through private expropriation, colonial plundering and exploitation should be repaid.

Support the struggles of the popular classes! World resources should be marshalled primarily for the struggle against hunger, starvation and poverty as well as for compensating the destruction of natural resources and living conditions and for the funding of sustainable development. Generally, investments in public infrastructures and services have to be enforced. Salaries, along with investments in social and ecological development, need to take precedence over shareholder value. The right to work and to food has to be guaranteed. Public employment must be increased in order to counteract precarisation. This means expanding collective and cooperative forms of work, which efficiently contribute to human development and enrich human relations and which are not oriented to the production of surplus value.

Control and downsize the global financial sector: 75 % off now! We demand the prohibition of toxic assets, derivatives, hedge funds and private equity. We demand the prevention of

further liberalisation, the tightening of bank, financial, and capital controls and the closing of tax havens. We need to establish a solidarity global currency and a financial and trade order that promotes the equalisation of trade and current account balances and that promotes sustainable development and (minimum) social and political standards. It is not only banks but investment as such that has to be socialised and become a public function, reversing the priority of profits over people.

A dramatic and urgent shift of the whole mode of production, distribution and consumption is necessary. This requires: the socialisation of the core sectors of the economies, of natural resources; the immediate initiation of a radical ecological conversion; increased quality and sustainability of products to reduce wasteful consumption; the replacement of agribusiness monoculture by cooperative peasant agriculture. 75 % reduction in the use of energy and resources as well as 75 % less emissions. Climate justice!

Let people decide! This means filling representative electoral democracy with content and promoting a meaningful participatory democracy with *consultas populares*, people's planning processes, councils and participatory budgets where effective decisions are taken. This entails a democratisation of the economy that goes beyond classical workers' co-determination and establishes genuine participation by workers, unions, public consumers and other stakeholders in company decision-making (with impact on the whole transnational production chain). The goal is to displace the capitalist boards of directors with collective boards of directors, embedded in territorial and community councils.

Reclaim the commons! Basic needs should be available as common goods, that is, there should be essentially free access to land, seeds, water, and unpolluted air. There must be no more patents on life. Knowledge, technology and research should also be part of the commons, as well as free local transportation systems and free access to all other basic goods of general interest. Any attempt to privatise public property has to be stopped, and the trend of selling out the common sphere has to be reversed. Public social security systems must be defended and extended, and concrete policies have to respond to housing needs in the South and North.

Let us concentrate on a *solidarity care economy*, a reorientation towards health, education and training, research, food sovereignty and land reform, social services, caring for children, the elderly and the ill, as well as for our natural environment. This would also be a contribution to an ecological mode of production, to an emancipatory rearrangement of gender relations and the development of a practice of *bien vivir*. This reorientation towards de-commodification, the domestic market, regionalisation, and, in part, de-globalisation counters export-led, industrial growth models, privatisation and valorisation, as well as rising inequities and imbalances in the world.

Withdraw all Western armies and shut down foreign military bases. The greatest waste of all is the enormous amount of money spent for destructive means of force. We therefore demand: at least 75 % reduction in military expenditures; abolish the veto rights in the UN Security Council; dismantle NATO; ban all nuclear weapons.

PROGRAMME OF WORK

We have helped develop an analysis, predicted the crisis, and contributed to the delegitimation of neoliberalism. But we have not yet been able to overcome the prevailing power structures. Neoliberal capitalism has begun to lose credibility but is still dominant.

Our common objective is to break this dominance. There is a convergence of the different struggles, there is intense communication, expressed solidarity, practiced cooperation and experiments with concrete initial projects. We in turn give our full support to the different struggles and work to connect them. As intellectuals, we try to lend coherence to our perspectives and practice.

Urgent action needs to be taken to prevent the crisis from becoming even more serious and causing yet more damage. This immediate action includes:

- Participation in the World Climate Summit in Copenhagen or organisation of decentralised actions for climate justice; the rejection of market mechanisms such as carbon trading; the immediate transformation of the energy chain; the rejection of nuclear power;
- The rejection of further liberalisation; the blocking of the upcoming WTO negotiations as well as the so-called Economic Partnership Agreements and Free Trade Agreements with the South;
- Preventing the reduction in state expenditures in order to pay the state debt resulting from the crisis; supporting the struggles against the crisis; the banning of derivatives, short selling, and the shutting down of tax havens; the prohibition of speculation on food and energy; a moratorium on debt payment by the South;
- The re-appropriation of the commons, factories, the land, and the public as well as participation in political action;
- Stopping the wars, disarming the world.

NEW GLOBAL SOLIDARITY

The new global solidarity is built on the struggle of the victims of the dominant economic system, the nations of the South, which are the targets of imperialist policies, and the subaltern classes of the North and the South, either exploited or made vulnerable. It implies cooperation between the large regions of the world on the basis of complementarity. It requires the respect and the protection of the planet and a dialogue between the various cultures of the world. It means the realisation of the common good of humankind. Global solidarity is the only guarantee of hope for the future of humanity.

We have the numbers and the ideas. They still have the power. Let us seize it!

SIGNATORIES:

ABIOLA, Hafsat (Nigeria); ALTVATER, Elmar (Germany); AMIN, Samir (Senegal); BAWTREE, Victoria (France); BEAUDET, Pierre (Canada); BELLO, Walden (Philippines); BRENNAN, Brid (Netherlands); BRIE, Michael (Germany); CANDEIAS, Mario (Germany); CANEPA, Eric (Italy); CASSEN, Bernard (France); CATALINOTTO, John (USA); CHACHRA, Sandeep (India);

COX, Jennifer (USA); DAIBER, Brigit (Germany/Belgium); DIERCKXSENS, Wim (Honduras/Costa Rica); DRISSI CHALBI, Hassania (Tunisia); ESKELINEN, Teppo (Finland); FOUNOU, Bernard (Cameron/Senegal); GAUTHIER, Elisabeth (France); GEORGE, Susan (France) GILLS, Barry K (UK); HABASHI Mamdouh (Egypt); HAGEN, Mark (Germany); HEINE, Henning (Germany); HOUTART, François (Belgium); KEET, Dot (South Africa); KULKE, Roland (Belgium/Germany); LANDER, Edgardo, (Venezuela); LAU Kin Chi (Hong Kong); MASSIAH, Gustave (France); MENON, Meena (India); MERKUSHEV, Vitaly (Russia); MOYO, Samson (Zimbabwe); MURTHY, P.K. (India); NAKATANI, Paulo (Brasil); OSMANOVIC, Armin (Germany); PÁEZ, Pedro (Ecuador); RILLING, Rainer (Germany); ROCHAT, Florian (Switzerland); SCHOLZ, Helmut (Germany); VERVEST, Pietje (Netherlands); WACHTEL, Howard (USA); WEN Tiejun (China); YAKUSHIK, Valentin (Ukraine)