

The Imperial Mode of Living and the Present Global Situation

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Ulrich Brand and Markus Wissen¹

Three scenarios

In a statement at the beginning of the pandemic Naomi Klein talks rather casually about *Corona capitalism* with respect to the current situation.² The term is instructive. She means handling the crisis for the benefit of wealthy people and economic sectors that destroy nature. This becomes especially apparent in the governmental ‘rescue packages’ – and in the private healthcare industry, she writes. A further symptom could be seen in the highly uneven distribution of vaccines on a world scale. As has been the case during prior crises, repeated shock policies cause permanent strengthening of the already powerful, who do not show any consideration for society and nature. The term ‘Corona capitalism’ requires further elaboration, but it signals: during any crisis, various options or ways for handling it are possible; these affect and change capitalist modes of production and living.

Besides the openly regressive crisis policies in favour of the upper classes, to the disadvantage of the poor and at the expense of nature, other alternatives have emerged. One of them are the various *Green Economy* approaches, most prominently the European Green Deal.³ They are based in the paradigm of an ecological modernisation and were already discussed in the economic crisis of 2007 ff.⁴ But it required competitive pressures, profit opportunities and the availability and maturity of technologies (see e.g. electro-automobility) as well as the rise of a new climate movement, which politicized the ever more

¹ This paper is a revised and extended version of the afterword to our book *The Imperial Mode of Living. Everyday Life and the Ecological Crisis of Capitalism*, London: Verso, 2021.

² Naomi Klein, *Coronavirus Capitalism: Naomi Klein’s Case for Transformative Change Amid Coronavirus Pandemic. Transcript of a broadcast of DemocracyNow!*, 19 March, 2020 (democracynow.org).

³ European Commission, *Communication from the Commission to European Parliament, the Council, the European Social and Economic Committee and the Committee of the Regions. The European Green Deal*. Com (2019) 640 final, Brussels, 2019 (eur-lex.europa.eu).

⁴ See e.g. UNEP, *Towards a green economy. Pathways to Sustainable Development and Poverty Eradication*, 2011 (unep.org).

dramatic and at the same time ever more precise findings of climate science, to equip the Green Economy concepts with the power that is necessary to become more influential in business and the state apparatus.

The question remains if the Green Economy/Green Deal paradigm serves as an imaginary that is able to orientate and unite liberal progressive forces in the economy and politics, to provide for a sufficient degree of economic coherence and to create new terrains of conflict that institutionalize social struggles in a way that is favourable to the operation of a green-capitalist regime of accumulation. Given the current situation of a deep unsettledness of the economic and political elites, this seems to be at least a viable option. The failure of the socio-environmentally destructive neoliberal and imperialist order is quite visible: In the inability of neoliberalised health systems to effectively manage the Corona crisis, in the helplessness of state policies in the face of floods, fires and other symptoms of an aggravating climate crisis, in the vulnerability of a globalised and digitalised economy vis-à-vis hacker attacks and the interruption of supply chains, and not least in the recent NATO disaster in Afghanistan. It has underlined the pressing need for new concepts which promise to safeguard the capitalist order and their protagonists and beneficiaries from the early industrialized countries through an in-depth transformation.

A Green Deal/Green Economy strategy promises to process the socio-environmental contradictions of advanced capitalism in some parts of the world. It will not, however, contribute to overcoming them.⁵ Capitalism even in a green form does not cease to be driven by competition and economic growth. It continues to rely on the large-scale exploitation of labour power and natural resources (probably rather metals and biomass than fossil fuels) as well as on the destruction of ecosystems. The imperial mode of living thus is perpetuated through its selective modernisation. There is also no clear cut to the regressive strategy of redistribution from the bottom to the top and to an authoritarian stabilisation of the imperial mode of living as it has been enforced by Corona capitalism. As can be seen particularly in the migration and raw materials policies of the EU, an ecological modernisation under capitalist conditions requires legal, economic and physical force in order to secure its own preconditions and to externalise its costs.⁶

⁵ Brand and Wissen, *The Imperial Mode of Living*, chap. 7.

⁶ Marcel van der Linden refers to Alf Hornborg's concept of unequal ecological exchange, a topic that would indeed deserve further attention and elaboration (see the conference paper *Historicizing the*

A third scenario, lighting up in various progressive struggles around the world, consists of transforming the economy into the direction of a *feminist and democratic eco-socialism*. It would strengthen, and equally distribute, care work, decommodify and enhance social and physical infrastructures and put them under democratic control. As such it would form the nucleus of a process that transcends capitalism and the imperial mode of living. The experiences of the Corona crisis have made such a scenario thinkable again. In a still ongoing situation of immense human suffering, enhanced global and social inequality and the failure of economic and political elites, they have rendered visible what really matters for social reproduction and a good life, namely care work and social infrastructures under public control; they have also shown the dysfunctionality of neoliberalised infrastructures and the precariousness of the mostly female and often migrant labour force; and in doing so, they have stressed the need to socially recognize and redistribute the respective work and to improve the conditions of those who do it.⁷

From a hegemony and regulation theoretical perspective the three competing scenarios indicate that we are amidst a period of crisis and struggles for a new social and international order.⁸ The neoliberal-imperialist mode of development under the leadership of the USA, that has dominated the last decades, has exhausted its economic, social and, in particular, ecological potentials of coherence and functionality. Its institutions are no longer able to contain the social and international contradictions and to safeguard the

Imperial Mode of Living: Preliminary notes on what we (do not yet) know).

⁷ Christa Wichterich, 'Der prekäre Care-Kapitalismus. Sorgeextraktivismus oder die neue globale Arbeitsteilung', *Blätter für deutsche und internationale Politik*, (2), 2018, pp. 91-97; Foundational Economy Collective, *Foundational Economy. The Infrastructure of Everyday Life*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2018.

⁸ For Torkil Lauesen, the principal contradiction of contemporary capitalism is the one between neoliberalism and nationalism (see Torkil Lauesen, *Riding the Wave. Sweden's Integration into the Imperialist World System*, Montreal: Kersplebedeb, 2021, pp. 175-178). We would agree that these two are dominant forces. However, we would add two differentiations: first, neoliberal globalism is moving into a greener direction in order to cope with the contradictions it has produced itself; secondly, progressive forces (our third scenario) also have gained strength. The 'spontaneous rebellions' in which they become visible and which according to Lauesen lack a 'clear vision of an alternative or a strategy to reach it' (p. 186) are hardly imaginably without taken into account social processes of fermentation and organisation which precede, and do not cease with, them. The challenge for the political and academic left thus is to take into account the deep structure of progressive struggles, their embeddedness in everyday life and their impact below the threshold of a revolutionary break and identify both the obstacles and potentials of strengthening them.

accumulation process in favour of the dominant factions of capital. Their dysfunctionality is politicized by progressive social movements in an emancipatory manner as well as by the extreme right that strives for an authoritarian or even fascist order. Internationally the economic and political dominance of the US is challenged particularly by China. The current situation thus can be characterized by the Gramscian term of an *interregnum*.⁹ From the point of view of regulation theory¹⁰ we can identify 'search processes' that may result in a new capitalist mode of development, like green capitalism in some parts of the world, or overcome the capitalist mode of production in favour of a different social order.

In the following, we will have a closer look on these developments, discussing the diverse forces of change as well as the forces of inertia. We do this from the perspective of the concept of the imperial mode of living and with the objective of identifying the chances, obstacles and preconditions of a solidary mode of living: what can we do today to make living in society, work, social institutions and infrastructures, democracy and the relationship between society and nature sustainably future-proof? How can the opening of society, which has suddenly made the hitherto unthinkable possible, be used to struggle for a more just, more democratic society, but especially for a society that also enables future generations to have a fulfilling life on our planet?

Learning Processes During the Corona Crisis?

During the last one and a half years, unfamiliar and drastic limitations to daily life have arisen: Keep your distance, masks, gatherings of many people are not allowed, home office, reduced or no income at all for many people, closed social institutions such as preschools, schools, universities, recreational facilities or beer gardens and restaurants. Most people consider excessive critique of the current measures to be inappropriate. The lock-down is intended to protect us and itself has negative psychological, social, and physical effects. Add to this the slumps in industrial production, service industry and agriculture, which become apparent in fewer harvest workers from Eastern Europe. World trade is brought to its knees,

⁹ Antonio Gramsci, *Gefängnishefte. Band 2, 2. und 3. Heft*, Hamburg, Berlin: Argument, 1991, p. 354.

¹⁰ See e.g. Michel Aglietta, *A Theory of Capitalist Regulation. The US Experience*, London: New Left Books, 1979; Alain Lipietz, 'Akkumulation, Krisen und Auswege aus der Krise. Einige methodische Überlegungen zum Begriff "Regulation"', *PROKLA*, 15(1), 1985, pp.109-137; Bob Jessop, 'Regulation Theory', in George Ritzer (ed.), *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Sociology*, Malden MA: Blackwell, 2015.

an extremely low, at times even negative, price of oil is the result. Unemployment strongly increases in all countries. The 'care crisis' and problems with reproduction become especially visible since 24-hour care by migrating care providers is no longer guaranteed due to border closings.¹¹ Care work, which for the middle class so far had been easy to externalize along class or ethnic lines, must now be negotiated again within households, primarily between the sexes.

The current crisis shows very clearly how vulnerable socially disadvantaged populations, such as people who live in poverty, people who are precariously employed and refugees, are in particular. In many industries, smaller companies will have more problems with weathering the crisis than do large corporations. The question of who will assume the cost after the crisis will be answered along existing inequities and power relationships – unless active political countermeasures are taken.

Paradoxically, global CO₂ emissions reduced in 2020, although not as a result of intentional and sustainably designed climate policy measures. Thus, there has certainly been no initiation of a climate-friendly socio-ecological transformation. Rather, especially in matters of Corona crisis handling, at first glance we seem to be in an open situation that makes many things possible and advances new ideas. However, the situation is not as open as it might appear. The reason is that powerful capital groups which depend on the use of fossil fuels and other natural resources or earn much money from these, have an interest in returning to the 'normality' of the imperial mode of production and living during pre-Corona times. Governments are closely intertwined with these strong capital groups and some industries will likely see an even stronger concentration of companies. Similarly, many people in fixed employment situations and the organizations representing them have an interest in restoring the situation before the crisis.

Nonetheless, there could be some crisis-related rethinking towards 'greener' and solidary elements of the mode of production and living, if political forces are mobilised accordingly and such rethinking appears to be attractive to prevailing politics. The legitimation pressure, in particular in view of the climate crisis, has not disappeared. And some branches, such as the automotive industry or financial markets, experienced massive problems even before the pandemic broke out. In any case, current experiences are

¹¹ Sarah Schilliger, 'Verschärfte Normalität im Ausnahmezustand. Transnationale Care-Arbeit in Privathaushalten unter COVID-19', *SozBlog*, 2021 (blog.soziologie.de).

ambivalent, the situation is contested and also offers entry points for a left-wing policy towards a solidary mode of living.

Changing political logics?

Firstly, crises are always 'the hour of executive'; one can see that, for one, in the fact that populations' agreement with their governments tends to (strongly) rise during a crisis; for the other, the parliamentary opposition barely makes an appearance in most European countries. Parliaments sign off on far-reaching measures and gigantic 'rescue' packages in the countries of the Global North.

Argentinian sociologist Maristella Svampa calls the current state a 'health leviathan' that limits fundamental rights and claims powers for itself.¹² Handling the Corona crisis could serve those in government as an illustration for how far they can go in declared emergency situations. Many measures are accepted by society. This could possibly strengthen people's common sense, according to which crises must be handled mainly in an authoritarian fashion and fundamental rights, the rule of law and democracy must be limited.

Beyond these problematic tendencies, who would have thought just a few months ago that governments could intervene so decisively in the life of people and in economic activities? The story goes that the state is not at all in a position to quickly re-align and that 'far-reaching' measures cannot be conveyed to and expected of people.

At the same time, governments' handling of this situation is not pre-ordained: In the beginning, the US government denied, Great Britain wavered, South Korea isolated groups at risk and in many countries there were lock-downs, including dramatic enactments. Lock-down means that governments decree a temporary interruption in the capitalist growth machinery, but also in many places limit the activities of the population which ensure their daily survival.

What can we learn from this? Just as governments took drastic measures more or less rapidly against the spread of the Corona virus, the climate crisis could be used as an occasion to initiate a clearer political re-routing towards socio-ecological transformation. The knowledge of climate change and its consequences exists and is no longer denied by most governments.

¹² Maristella Svampa, 'Reflexiones para un mundo post-coronavirus', *Nueva Sociedad Online*, April 2020 (nuso.org).

As during the financial and economic crisis that began in 2007/2008, it is also clear now that many countries in the capitalist centres are in a position of mobilizing enormous regulatory and financial resources in an attempt to fight phenomena of economic and now also health crises. This is accomplished to varying degrees and each measure affects social inequality to a greater or lesser extent and is justified with the emergency. The mantra of the balanced budget as the core element of austerity policies no longer applies at present. If the social relationships of power do not change significantly, this mantra will strike back much harder.

Furthermore, we should not revel in illusions regarding the role of the state in countries such as Germany, Austria, or Switzerland. If clear social and ecological criteria (see below) are not attached to the rescue packages, these packages are part of the hard neo-liberal capitalist reality: It is a well-known strategy, in particular by large companies and in their cooperation with the state that profits are privatized and losses are socialized. At the same time, an important experience remains: Despite being entangled with large companies, the state can certainly re-route in certain situations, even against powerful economic interests, and thus show consideration for social concerns.¹³

Converting production?

This applies, secondly, also to companies. Just half a year ago, people would have reacted with amazement to some changes: Automotive manufacturers and suppliers produce health-related goods, i.e., protective masks and ventilators. Governments call for buying local and domestic products to support domestic producers. Indirectly, the heavy and now dangerous dependence on global supply chains is recognized. In many industries, the negative effects of the crisis are shifted along supply chains to the weakest link, that is, the producers in the world market factories of the global South. Thus, an old demand by the movement critical of globalization is again becoming topical; that demand is expressed, for example, in the term progressive 'de-globalization'.¹⁴ Resource-intensive long-range tourism is mostly interrupted in 2020 and allows for more regional forms of travel.

¹³ Steffen Lehndorff, *"New Deal" means being prepared for conflict. What we can learn from the New Deal of the 1930s*, Hamburg: VSA, 2020; Michael Brie, *Transformation heißt Mut, das Ganze zu wagen. Was wir von der ökonomischen Mobilisierung der USA im Krieg gegen den Faschismus lernen können, es heute anders zu machen*, Manuscript, 2021.

¹⁴ Walden Bello, *Deglobalization: Ideas for a New World Economy*, London: Zed Books, 2004.

If government interventions in entrepreneurial activity are now deemed to be legitimate, other questions about the control of economic activities can also be asked: What importance will the public sector have in the future? Who determines investment by companies or in public infrastructures and based on which socio-ecological criteria are these decisions taken? This opens the possibilities for a 'stable resilience economy'.¹⁵ This should not be read as the dream of capital for freedom from crises, but as a condition for socio-ecological transformation. A resilient economy implies an overall low level of domestic gross product with consequences for working hours, income, employment, and social insurance systems.¹⁶ The discussion about dismantling and converting unsustainable economic sectors, such as the defence and automotive industries, secured by appropriate labour market and socio-ecological industrial policies, would need to be intensified.

Strengthening reproduction?

Thirdly, it is becoming clear in a way in which it rarely had been clear before that people are highly dependent on biophysical and social conditions, vulnerable to viral infections and to inadequate provision of healthcare. The widespread assumption of autonomous individuals who are primarily concerned with maximizing utility is disgraced. Health is not luck and illness not (only) fate; rather, both are also affected by social conditions. The neo-liberal emaciation of the healthcare sector now causes much suffering, even death – and for those working in certain industries enormous pressures at work and risks. The insufficient supply of medical care in the US and Europe becomes visible mainly in countries such as Great Britain, Greece, Italy and Spain; in the latter few mostly caused by austerity measures or EU conditions in the wake of the Euro crisis. It looks even more gloomy in the countries of the global South that passed through neo-liberal 'structural adjustments' imposed from the outside. Not the least as a result of such experiences, a broad social debate about the state of the healthcare system arose.

Here medical and, in particular, care professions and other 'system-relevant' occupations of general interest that maintain indispensable social functions are valued more – however, so far, mainly symbolically. Such occupations include the activities of people in

¹⁵ Steffen Lange and Tilman Santarius, 'Die Corona-Krise erfordert eine Transformation zu einer krisenfesten Resilienzwirtschaft', *Ökonomenstimme*, 9 April 2020 (oekonomenstimme.org).

¹⁶ Ibid.

food production and trade, or in maintaining basic public infrastructure. There are critical discussions about the goods, services and industries that may have been considered too important so far, such as (large) cars, quickly obsolete consumer goods, ever new clothes, weekend trips and other status products.¹⁷ The ‘foundational economy’, consisting of the infrastructures of everyday life¹⁸, is currently valued more highly, which could remain an important experience. This experience, too, should not just be forgotten again, even if the old (gender) hierarchies are quickly re-established after crises.

Transforming everyday practices?

Fourthly, during these confusing weeks and months, we can or must learn that people are certainly willing to radically change their everyday behaviour, if this is credibly shown to be mutually beneficial. For people who have no or few care duties and also stable incomes, the Corona lock-downs may have had the paradoxical effect that the socially enforced pause in one’s own daily living is even considered pleasant – despite worries about the overall social and economic situation. This is true especially for people who can set up their office at home (and these tend to be professions with higher incomes). Unionized workers embedded in a functioning social security system may have discovered the advantages of reduced working hours. By contrast, for many people with precarious employment or for self-employed, the interruption in normality is an economic disaster. In the private sphere, too, enormous burdens often arise: home schooling, stay-at-home orders and prohibition against contact are often exhausting for children and parents, a stress test that is exacerbated by cramped living situations.

Nonetheless, despite the uncertainty, as well as material, social and psychological burdens, potential elements of a solidary mode of living that are implemented in practice might have become visible in the Corona crisis. Due to less car traffic, cities appeared more relaxed,¹⁹ and more space has been allocated to cycling, which often proves to be an

¹⁷ Marcel van der Linden, *Historicizing the Imperial Mode of Living*, provides many impressive examples for how the consumption patterns of workers have changed historically. However, the focus on consumption runs danger to downplay the production side and related work relations. We consider “the global interactions among laboring classes” he mentions at the beginning of the paper (p. 1) an interesting and important perspective.

¹⁸ Foundational Economy Collective, *Foundational Economy*.

¹⁹ It remains to be seen if this is thwarted by a new appreciation of the car as a ‘protected sphere’ – a tendency that has already been observable before the pandemic. See Peter Wells and Dimitrios Xenias, ‘From “freedom

alternative to both public transit and automotive mobility. Many people felt this to be a comfortable situation; it can thus be a collective experience which can be taken up.

There is reason to believe that after the crisis a new *We* will be created; only together will we get 'the economy' up and running again in its old contours: work, coupled with much overtime and for many under precarious conditions, hyper-consumption, but keeping still politically as the highest civic duty. But this *We* is contested, it will produce inclusions and exclusions. Here it offers at least the opportunity for strengthening socio-ecological dimensions. The ambivalent experiences of everyday life, freed from their compulsory character, could certainly harbour points of contact for a solidary mode of living. Basic income, which has been introduced quickly in some European countries, such as Spain, and is intended to secure the livelihoods of millions of people, likely cannot simply be rescinded.

Between re-nationalisation and international cooperation

Fifthly, there is an urgency of international politics and cooperation. This became quite clear during the World Health Organisation's diagnosis of the pandemic. At the same time, crisis policies are mostly conducted by nation states (despite more recent joint efforts, such as those of the European Union). 'No halfway measures', the German minister of finance Olaf Scholz demanded in mid-March. One's 'own' economy is primarily to be rescued, even if that could further weaken the European Union. The rich European countries are more likely to achieve this than the poor ones, and this will lead to further processes of economic concentration. The non-solidary EU politics towards refugees becomes especially apparent during the Corona crisis. Not least, due to the highly uneven distribution of vaccines, the pandemic is spreading with disastrous consequences in many countries of the global South.

Nonetheless, the international dimension of the Corona crisis also attracts greater attention to the conditions (first and foremost, the health conditions) in other countries. After long negotiations, a European rescue package was agreed upon in July 2020. It is designed to support particularly those EU countries and regions that are most heavily affected by the crisis. Against the resistance of Austria, Denmark, the Netherlands, Sweden and Finland that defended a rigid austerity politics the fund to a large parts provides for non-

of the open road" to "cocooning": Understanding resistance to change in personal private automobility', *Environmental Innovation and Societal Transitions*, 16, 2015, pp. 106-119.

repayable grants and, for the first time in history, permits the European Commission to undertake borrowing on a large scale, thus indicating at least a weakening of the hard austerity politics that characterized the management of the preceding crisis. The necessity of international political cooperation becomes clear from the fact that UN General Secretary António Guterres demanded in March 2020 that sanctions against Iran be lifted to facilitate the fight against the Corona virus there. Cancellation of debt for low-income countries has meanwhile been demanded by many. Such a cancellation should not be understood as a generous action on the part of rich countries, but as compensation for historical colonial debt. A 'social world domestic policy'²⁰ as institutional implementation of the demand for global social rights could win wider support.

A 'great crisis'

The questions we have raised so far and the contradictory empirical developments which have provoked them suggest that we are amidst a 'great crisis'. We use this term in a hegemony and regulation theoretical way. In contrast to a 'minor crisis', a great crisis cannot be overcome within an existing regime of accumulation and mode of regulation because the prevailing social and political institutions and the (economic policy) instruments the latter rely on do not take effect any more. Rather than being a remedy, the established institutions and policy instruments produce and enhance the crisis. A great crisis thus 'leads to a more profound restructuring of the capitalist mode of production, the modes of living, technologies, forms of the state, dominant understandings of a good – or at least functioning – society, etc.'²¹ This may result in a new mode of capitalist development and would then form part of what Gramsci has called a 'passive revolution'. It can however also initiate a dynamic that finally transcends capitalism. In this case, a great crisis *within* the capitalist mode of production, marking the transition between two modes of development, would

²⁰ Stefan Peters, *Ungleichheit ist tödlich: Die Corona-Pandemie in globaler Perspektive*, Manuscript, 2020.

²¹ Ulrich Brand, Christoph Görg and Markus Wissen, 'Overcoming neoliberal globalization: socialecological transformation from a Polanyian perspective and beyond', *Globalizations*, 17(1), 2020, pp. 161-176, here: 165-166. See also Lipietz, 'Akkumulation', and Elmar Altvater, *Die Zukunft des Marktes. Ein Essay über die Regulation von Geld und Natur nach dem Scheitern des „real existierenden Sozialismus“*, Münster: Westfälisches Dampfboot, 1991, pp. 56-63.

evolve into a crisis *of* the capitalist mode of production, giving rise to a new form of organizing society.

Of course, it is by no means clear that the socio-economic legacy of the Corona crisis won't be addressed by the conventional neoliberal means of austerity policy, i.e. within the prevailing mode of regulation, once the health situation in the countries of the global North has stabilized again. The respective economic and political forces are still strong. Their perceptions and interests have been inscribed into the logic according to which central banks, ministries, financial markets and, not least, the academia function. However, it is this very logic that has been questioned by the economic crisis of 2007 ff. and, with even more emphasis, by the Corona pandemic. Both crises have shown that neoliberal policies, far from being able to contain the contradictions of the capitalist mode of production, contribute to aggravating them – be it in monetary terms by giving rise to financial bubbles, or be it in socio-ecological terms by commodifying ever more spheres of society and nature and thus contributing to the exhaustion of labour power, to the demolition of essential infrastructures and to the destruction of natural habitats which then strikes back in the form of diseases.²²

The current unsettledness of the elites may be due to the uneasiness this constellation has produced among them: the (largely unacknowledged) sentiment that they have manoeuvred themselves into an ideological and institutional impasse which leaves them without the means to combat the crisis. This constellation opens political spaces for progressive forces, which, by developing a radical and attractive alternative, can not only safeguard and restore the conditions of (a good) life for the many, but also effectively counter the threat of a new fascism.

²² See Elmar Altvater, *Der große Krach – oder die Jahrhundertkrise von Wirtschaft und Finanzen, von Politik und Natur*, Münster: Westfälisches Dampfboot, 2010; Rob Wallace, Alex Liebman, Luis Fernando Chaves and Rodrick Wallace, 'Covid and Circuits of Capital', *Monthly Review*, 72(1) (monthlyreview.org). Nearly 20 years ago Jamie Peck and Adam Tickell came up with a similar terminology that may be helpful to understand the current situation. They distinguished between a 'roll-back' and a 'roll-out' neoliberalism. Whereas the former confronted the contradictions of the Fordist mode of development in the 1970s, the latter is confronted with the contradictions that it has created by itself, i.e. through its very functioning. The recent cumulation of crises indicates that neoliberalism could have reached the final stage of its roll-out phase. See Jamie Peck and Adam Tickell, 'Neoliberalizing Space', *Antipode*, 34(3), 2002, pp. 380-404.

Solidary Mode of Living

What would a progressive policy of a solidary mode of living look like during Corona virus times, but also a policy against a possibly solidifying 'Corona capitalism', in which the tendencies towards inequality, destruction of nature and authoritarianism are continued? Despite all confusion: Critical thinking and left-wing strategies should, according to the Institute for Critical Social Analysis of Rosa Luxemburg Foundation, 'use this window of opportunity while also highlighting, discussing, and organizing a perspective that reaches even further. This is not an "either/or" of achieving a voluntaristic "jackpot" or a pragmatic "small potatoes". Instead, it unites practices of resistance and concrete entry projects with strategic perspectives.'²³ The various crisis moments will be articulated very differently and the way in which this will happen is difficult to predict. It is also important to tie into experiences that have been formed during the protest movements and alternative practices of the last few years.²⁴

Linkages are created under conditions of great uncertainty. In view of the deep crisis of society-nature relations, Christoph Görg therefore argues for a 'new handling of uncertainties' and at the same time for an aggressive transformative politics: 'The challenge rather consists precisely of this: to justify the need for a great transformation of the capitalist model of prosperity precisely with the dangers that the attempt to control nature relations by using strategies for dominating nature has triggered.'²⁵ It is not about security but reflecting on the causes of the pandemic and its threat 'precisely because the virus cannot be controlled completely'.²⁶ This is an important point of contact for a left approach.

²³ Institute for Critical Social Analysis & Friends, *A window of opportunity for leftist politics? How to continue in and after the crisis*, Berlin: Rosa Luxemburg Foundation, 2020, pp. 11–12 (rosalux.de).

²⁴ Luci Cavallero and Verónica Gago, *Crack Up! Eine feministische Agenda für die Post-Pandemie*, Berlin: Rosa Luxemburg Foundation, 2020 (rosalux.de), talk about a collective agenda that connects in particular with the feminist struggles of the last few years and now can become a joint resource: the feminist strikes, the demand for re-negotiating public and private debt, the fight against domestic violence and femicides that are increasing during quarantine. Add disputes about the (in)visibilisation of certain forms of work and social reproduction. Platform capitalism is 'in the final analysis borne by concrete bodies, despite its faith in the metaphysics of algorithms and GPS. ... These, generally migratory, bodies are those who cross the empty cities and who – due to their exposure – allow for the supply and retreat of many people.' (Ibid.)

²⁵ Christoph Görg, *Die Corona-Pandemie als sozial-ökologische Krise. Unsicherheiten, Kränkungen und die Beschleunigung der Zivilisationskrise*, Manuscript, 2020, pp. 1-2.

²⁶ Ibid.

It is crucial to emphasize firmly established but obvious absurdities in capitalist production that can be presented in a different light. Publicist Kathrin Hartmann mentions one of these absurdities of the capitalist world market, which is now becoming apparent with the crisis of global supply chains: While Germany could supply 90% of its own foodstuffs, the country is the globally third-largest importer of agricultural products and food products. The reason is the heavy alignment of German agriculture with the production and export of meat and milk products.²⁷

The Corona crisis achieves a specific dynamics also from the fact that the imperial mode of living has been politicised by the movement for climate justice and that there is some discussion about the extent to which current policies must also be implemented for the climate crisis. An example has been the widespread public demand to tie rescue packages for the airline and automotive industries to social and ecological criteria.

This brings us to the question of political initiatives. In view of the existing economic and political power structures, variegated proposals and initiatives are required to keep upcoming decisions from being taken solely for the benefit of the prosperous and powerful and to strengthen potentials for a socio-ecological transformation. Urgent current measures are, for example, to increase the allowance for short-term work for low-income groups, defer rents, stop evictions and electricity disconnections due to non-payment, and additional pay for professions that are hazardous to health. An 'offensive for democracy' could allow for reflecting on the extent of the emergency measures taken and, conversely, for creating appropriate processes for decision-making in future similar crises, as well as for accelerating a democratic social and societal politics.

Organizations in the health sector would assume a key role in this process, a fact that was recently emphasized by Mike Davis: 'Since the days of Occupy, socialists have put the struggle against income and wealth inequality on Page One: a great achievement to be sure. But now we must take the next step of advocating social ownership and the democratization of economic power, with the healthcare and pharmaceutical industries as immediate targets.'²⁸

A central task of the left will be to prevent of a renewed policy of austerity. Such a

²⁷ Kathrin Hartmann, 'Das kommt nicht von außen. Was Epidemien mit der Zerstörung intakter Ökosysteme durch den Menschen zu tun haben', *Der Freitag*, No. 12, 2020 (freitag.de).

²⁸ Mike Davis, 'The Monster Enters', *New Left Review*, No. 122, 2020, p. 14.

policy is already emerging to some extent, for example, where municipalities are considering deferring necessary investments. Attac Austria, for example, counters this with the demand for 'Corona burden sharing': Assets from EUR 5 million are to be taxed once at 10%, assets from EUR 100 million at 30% and assets from EUR 1 billion at 60%. This could generate an additional EUR 70 to 80 billion, reduce inequality in the process, and at least somewhat stabilize financial markets.²⁹ For countries with heavy concentration of assets, such as Germany and Austria, this is a plausible proposal.

Left politics is internationalist politics in the sense of solidarity that also advocates for improving the living conditions of people in other countries and regions of the world. Currently, the unequal effect of the crisis on people on a global scale is becoming apparent. After centuries of colonial expropriation, many more people live under precarious conditions and quickly enter an existential crisis when they lack income. Health is not just the absence of diseases, such as infections, but a social state that creates the conditions for an adequate life free of fear, without material worries, without that life depending on income. In the countries of the global South, in particular, public infrastructures are weaker than they usually are in the global North. Cancellation of foreign debt and renunciation of free trade policies are therefore important conditions for independent development.

Thus, financial and political initiatives that go beyond containing the negative effects of the Corona crisis in the countries of the global South are urgently needed. Repeatedly, as well as today, the point is to re-think the economic and political world order with a view towards pushing back the imperial mode of living and implementing global social rights. To do so, various experiences with crises, as well as the manifold practised alternatives of a solidary mode of living must be acknowledged.³⁰

Finally, the point is to form possible or already incipient alliances between left party politics and movement actors, labour unions and associations, progressive people in science, in public administration and in management, in order to politically assert alternatives. To what extent Corona capitalism is solidified will depend, in addition to good analyses, especially on initiatives and conflicts that manage to achieve interventions in the dominant

²⁹ Attac Austria, *Corona-Lastenausgleich: Krisenlasten gerecht auf alle Schultern verteilen*, Vienna: Attac Austria, 2020 (attac.at).

³⁰ See Ashish Kothari, Ariel Salleh, Arturo Escobar, Federico Demaria and Alberto Acosta (eds.), *Pluriverse. A Post-Development Dictionary*, New Delhi: Tulika Books, 2020.

social discourses and power relationships.