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Reaffirming Life

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REAFFIRMING LIFE. POLITICAL LEADERSHIP IN DEFENCE OF HUMANITY

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1. Towards Political Leadership in Defence of Humanity

The economic policy of neoliberalism is fundamentalist and leads to the methodic exclusion and threatens elimination of 'other' nations, cultures and religions. The neoliberal policies of the G7, through the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, and the World Trade Organisation (WTO) have condemned to death by starvation, in a methodic and systematic way, great majorities in periphery nations with 'other' cultures and religions. Such methodic strangulation policies of whole cultures can be considered as silent genocides and constitute a crime against all humanity. As the policies of world market acquire a military expression of 'our' nation, culture, race or religion against 'other' nations, culture, race or religion, this silent genocide is transformed into state terrorism. As political leaders committed to humanity, we use religion as a force to solve conflicts, not create them. As a social movement committed to 'another possible world', ecumenism facilitates struggles for a world where many 'worlds' can co-exist, and against the use of culture or religion to save 'our' culture or religion, at the expense of the 'others' that are a menace to 'ours'. Leaders committed to a fairer 'alternative world' will combat any ideological argumentation insisting that 'our civilisation, religion, culture, or gender' is superior to that of any of the 'others' and claiming any exclusive right to be on this world at the expense of 'others'.

Neoliberal fundamentalism that sustains the infallibility of markets supports itself in the religious fundamentalism regarding the infallibility of the Bible. With the crisis of the myth regarding infinite growth, capitalism has ended being a utopia, and starts the battle over the distribution of the world, supported by the theology of prosperity that legitimises the concentration of wealth in the hands of the 'rightful' at the expense of the 'wrongful.'¹ Occidental fundamentalism leads thus to official terrorism. This tendency foments other fundamentalist responses, which tend to escalate a spiral of terrorism.

The terrorist attacks in New York on September 11, 2001, may be considered as an answer to exclusion and scorn. It is a terrorist response against official terrorism. Official terrorism thus foments terrorism by those excluded, in this way sowing more and more terror and death in their own centres of power, as was demonstrated in Madrid and London.

The spiral of terrorism reaffirms a world of exclusion where fewer and fewer will be saved. The 'chosen' culture, religion or nation legitimises killing ever more enemies and progressively isolates itself behind an ever more militarised wall. When the world drowns this way, the lecture of occidental fundamentalism is that Christ will come. It is God's will.² In this 'each for its own', however, ever larger majorities will take conscience that nobody will be saved unless we show solidarity with 'other' cultures, religions, or nations. The political leaders who believe in 'another possible world' have to move forward in their solidarity ethic as an indispensable condition to achieve the Common Good of all humanity.

While the great powers insist on keeping nuclear weapons, arguing that they need them for their national security, they cannot possibly hope to prevent other nations, and even terrorist groups, to acquire them. The double morality of nuclear weapons being good for 'us' but bad for the 'others' shows the logic of the bullies. Those that call themselves 'realists' erroneously believe that they can survive even the use of nuclear weapons. However, in reality they push the 'others' into using those weapons. It is time for political leaders, and first amongst them those in the nuclear club to commit their nations to total nuclear disarmament. Political leaders have to fight for an open world where all nuclear weapons are verifiably destroyed. The political leaders that believe that 'another world is possible' have to promote the idea that nobody will be safe with the nuclear arms policies for 'us' to defend 'ourselves' from the 'others'. The only doubt is if this conscience is achieved before or after official terrorism makes use of nuclear weapons and causes a holocaust.

The intolerance and horror of this downward spiral of terrorism demands a strong *alternative social movement and leadership in defence of humanity*. Faced with this real threat of a spiral of terror, it is necessary to foster the conscience that nobody on this planet will be safe. Political leaders committed to the defence of humanity need to work to obtain the political will that will allow us to mutually save ourselves. Solidarity with the 'others' is the necessary condition for 'my' salvation. To promote this type of conscience is precisely the role of those social movements and political leaders committed to another possible world where there would be a place for many other 'worlds'. Solidarity ethics allow the creation of a place for the 'others', without regard to race, culture, gender or religion.

2. Towards Political Leadership with Solidarity Ethics

The neoliberal market economy is based on totalising mercantile relations. Since the 1970s, neoliberalism introduces a new accumulation of capital, based not on economic growth as a whole, but through the distribution of existing markets in favour of the transnational corporations and the financial capital linked to them. At the end of the 1990s the division of the existing world markets was tilted in favour of transnationals based in the industrialised countries at the expense of the rest of the world. The accumulation of capital, through the division of the world, however, is finite. Once the division of space is exhausted through agreement amongst the major powers at the WTO, the division of the world acquires a more bellicose character. This was announced after September 11, 2001 with the invasion of Afghanistan and Iraq. The battle for markets in favour of a 'chosen' culture or nation, and without regard to cost, inevitably leads sooner or later to a world recession without precedent.

Amidst the pain from the methodic exclusion and elimination, global resistance is generated, which not only delegitimises the system as such, but also gives fertile ground for a solidarity ethic where the great majorities will realise that 'we' have no salvation unless we do not try to save the 'others'. The solidarity ethic that 'we' cannot live unless the 'others' (other people, other races, other genders, other nations, other cultures) also can live is produced amidst the pain from the 'each for its own'. The Common Good, consequently, is presented firstly as a resistance. The ethics of the Common Good rises in a conflictive relation with the current system. The Common Good is the solidarity ethic that recognises that there will be no life for 'us' if the 'others' cannot live. Political leadership requires anticipating this solidarity ethic in the quest of the Common Good.

3. Towards Political Leadership that Cares for Natural and Future Human Life

Solidarity-based leadership places the economy in function of *life* itself, and does not sacrifice life in the function of the market economy. From the point of view of the market, as a totalising system, the demands of human life are perceived as distortions. Human and natural life are perceived as mere resources or as means of accumulation. If accumulation does not include majorities, these constitute a distortion for capital. From the point of view of those affected humans, however, the totalisation of the market economy appears as a grave distortion for all human life. As the exclusion advances, we experience this vulnerability in a more acute and generalised way. While 20 % of the

world population is included in the market economy that consumes 80 % of resources, this contrasts with the remaining 80 % of the world population which is ever more excluded, and even considered as superfluous for the system. The screams from the excluded collective subject are claims for an alternative economy with a right to live without exclusion. Alternative social movements and political leaders committed to another possible world demand the guarantee of a Basic Citizenship Income at a world level, a basic income that guarantees all persons to live as citizens without dependence on the markets.³

A responsibly led economy cares for *life*. Care, not accumulation, is the purpose. Nature is seen as wealth and source of all life. The natural wealth as a conserved use value will surround us for a longer time. Therefore, preserving the current natural wealth is increasing the wealth stock in the present and in the future. For an ever more accelerating totalised market economy, sacrificing ever more resources constitutes the source of accumulation. From here derives disparagement of nature, for the conservation of natural wealth. The same occurs with the produced wealth. The shorter the life of the produced goods, the bigger the profits will be. Conservation of the natural or produced wealth increases present wealth and therefore human welfare, but not wealth as expressed in currencies. When we discard ever more produced wealth, nature is exploited again with an ever increasing speed. In this way genuine wellbeing is eroded, but capital prospers.

In the measure that natural life is reproduced at a slower rate than capital reproduces, the collapse of nature is a question of time. With this risk, all human life is at stake. If one starts from the permanent accumulation of capital, which requires permanent growth, it is impossible to talk about sustainable economies. The accumulation of capital sacrifices ever more natural, material and human life as a function of accumulation. As the destruction of nature puts human life at stake, resistance is developed, and the preservation of the environment as a common good or patrimony of humanity is glimpsed. Responsible leadership stands for sustainable economy based on an ethic of solidarity. Solidarity will be not only with nature, but also with future generations. The loss of natural life is a decrease in wealth not only for current generations, but also for future generations, and thus constitutes an economy without any solidarity. This loss of nature is not accounted for in a market economy, nor can it be accounted for in numbers. The loss of non-renewable resources means an incalculable loss. Responsible leaders have to 'take care'.

Responsible leaders in an alternative economy will take care that extraction of resources will not be greater than the rate in which nature can replace them in the long run. In a care economy, the speed of reproduction of materials in the economy has to decrease to adjust

itself to the speed of reproduction of nature itself. The consumption of natural renewable resources, in other words, cannot go faster than what nature is able to replace. The consumption of non-renewable resources imposes more strict limits. Biodiversity has to be placed at the heart of an economy oriented towards regulation of the natural life in harmony with human life. The starting point for a sustainable economy is the conservation and care for human, material and natural life span through time. Responsible leadership towards an economy in function of life implies a revalorisation of all life around us, including air, water and the environment in general. The natural and produced wealth, with care will lower contamination and so increase the genuine wellbeing, placing less emphasis on monetary accumulation and enhancing the prolongation of all life around us.

4. Towards Political Leadership that Cares for All

Responsible leadership stands for an economy that aims towards a society of equal and free human beings who as subjects construct their future. It is not a mere illusion but a mobilising project from the needs and particularities of life. The success of this mobilising project presupposes the exhaustion of the capitalist rationale. The limit for the capitalist rationale is found in the fact that capitalism has shortened the average life of even its own means of production. Since the Second World War, the average life of the used technology in companies has been relentlessly shortened. With this, the cost of technological innovation has risen in a geometrical rate. The incorporation of new technologies allowed the reduction of labour costs, but at a slower rate. Since the 1970s the cost of the labour force has fallen at a lesser rate than the cost of technological innovation. The result was a reduction in the rate of return. Due to this fact, capital investors had to look for cheaper labour costs in the periphery, and principally in China. Consequently, investment abandoned the productive sector in the West. Investment in the West has centred more on the division of the world as a means of accumulation of great capital at the expense of productive investments. With this tendency, the rate of growth of the global economy as a whole has fallen.

As the rate of economic growth falls, accumulation increasingly depends on the distribution of the world markets and resources. As the division becomes more aggressive, its economic cost tends to rise above any benefit. The final result is the prolonged crisis of capital we are going through nowadays. To save capital today, there is a tendency to mortgage the future. As we use up more and more credit as citizens, companies or states, demand and current consumption are reduced, with corresponding impact on the market economy for a while. The

whole system, however, is mortgaged. As any subject of credit, there is a limit to credit even for the most powerful nations. This limit is being reached nowadays. Testimony of this is the rise in the interest rates. As interest rates rise, the debt becomes unpayable and the systemic crisis of capitalism will become apparent as it cannot solve its own self-contradiction. The return to productive investment will become both a necessity and impossibility under the current rationality. As the average life of technology decreases, it lowers the profit rate, but as it is lengthened it will also decrease, as fewer products will be sold.

Faced with the global crisis, responsible leadership will inevitably have to be integrated in companies to lengthen the average life of a product as a function of the quality of those products. Capital will try to save profits through intellectual property rights. This artificial monopoly on knowledge gives an unproductive rent. Responsible leadership will stand for intellectual property as a patrimony of humanity. Responsible leadership will stand for longer average life of all products in the world. If its life span doubles, the most consumptive quintile in the world will need half the resources and products that nowadays are generated to keep their genuine level of welfare. It could keep on living without a loss in welfare, with half the work and half the money. On this basis, responsible leadership will stand for a global redistribution of income from the core to the periphery to boost production, employment, and income.

5. Towards a Responsible, Horizontal, Political Leadership

As the average life of everything produced is extended at the core, the quicker national product can grow in the periphery, the faster the income levels are evened around the world. Responsible leadership will stand for a combination of the 'economy of the necessary' and the 'economy of the sufficient'. This combination between the necessary in the South and the sufficient in the North will only be achieved with a radically participative democracy. In this context, as well, it is obvious that nature can only be saved if the rhythm of growth at the periphery is less than the rhythm of liberation of resources in the centre. Responsible leadership will stand for life in all its dimensions and thus try to achieve the Common Good as a joint project of all humanity. Responsible leadership stands for a utopia in a world where there is place for all 'worlds' in the highest possible equality and in harmony with nature. Responsible leadership stands for a post-capitalist society with a participative democracy and the inclusion of everybody in the political decisions. Responsible leadership stands for a more horizontal inclusive relationship.

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NOTES

- ¹ Franz Hinkelammer, 'La transformación del Estado de derecho bajo el impacto de la globalización', in: *PASOS* 117, February 2005, pp. 9-10.
- ² *Ibidem*.
- ³ María Julia Bertomeu *et al.*, 'La propuesta de la renta básica de ciudadanía', in: *El Dipló (Le Monde Diplomatique, Argentinian edition)* 73, July 2005, p. 8.