



## EDITORIAL

### MISSION AND ACTIVITIES OF THE ROSA LUXEMBURG FOUNDATION IN BRUSSELS

The Rosa Luxemburg Foundation is named after Rosa Luxemburg, the Polish-German politician of Jewish origin who was murdered in 1919. The Rosa Luxemburg Foundation locates itself in the spectrum of democratic socialism, and is close to the LEFT



Party in Germany. It has dedicated itself to the heritage of Rosa Luxemburg in its most modern sense: emancipative and critical of capitalism, radically democratic and opposed to all forms of dictatorship, dedicated to solidarity and

opposed to imperial power. Political education, critical societal analysis, comprehensive international work, and research grants are its most important areas of work. The slogan of the foundation is:

- > "Freedom without equality is exploitation; equality without freedom is oppression. Solidarity is the common root of freedom and equality."

*"Rosa Luxemburg goes Europe"*... was the slogan under which the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation launched the project of establishing a Brussels office in 2008. Brussels is not only the centre of European politics, but also a significant centre of world politics, particularly with regard to north-south policy. Brussels is also the headquarters of NATO. There are thus many political divides that run through Brussels, many of which may not always be completely visible at first sight.

These different fields of action are what determines the strategic orientation of our Brussels Office.

Our central topics refer to intra-European and global developments, particularly to the relationship between Europe and the world's regions. We are critical of the neo-liberal orientation of the policy of the European Union, and support a paradigm shift in European and international policy. We believe that the global economic crisis provides an opportunity to rethink the future with regard to the welfare of humankind on our planet, to relate the various aspects of the crisis to one another, and to place the fulfilment of the idea of an ecological and socially just international society on the political agenda. We collaborate on alternative strategies of European integration, concepts for economic democracy and services of public interest, approaches to participatory and multicultural democracy, and peace-policy projects, and we use the European platform to debate the realisation of progressive concepts in the world's regions.

We cooperate with the Foundation's other foreign offices<sup>1</sup> and with its Institute for Critical Social Analysis, with the left European foundation Transform, with European NGOs, trade unions and globalisation-critical social

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<sup>1</sup> The Foundation currently has offices in Sao Paolo, Mexico City, Johannesburg, Peking, Hanoi, Tel Aviv, Ramallah, Warsaw and Moscow. We are preparing to set up offices in western and eastern Africa, in India, in the Andes region and in New York.

movements, with the left parliamentary group in the European Parliament GUE/NGL, as well as with the European Left Party. We work together with intellectuals, think tanks and people involved in political practice.

We realise our initiatives in the form of seminars, conferences, thematic discussions, and in a monthly open discussion forum called "Rosa's Salon". We conduct lec-

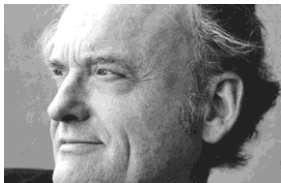
tures with outstanding leftist intellectuals to not only enrich the European and international discourse on the left, but also to confront key actors in Brussels with the analytical and strategic positions of the left. We disseminate our results in publications, education materials and on our website <http://rosalux-europa.info/>.

Birgit Daiber

## **FRIEDRICH SCHORLEMMER**

# **PEOPLE ARE CENTRAL: UNIVERSAL HUMAN RIGHTS AND THE EUROPEAN LEFT**

I am very happy to be here on this memorable day, and to be able to speak here sixty years after the proclamation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.



I would like to speak about universal human rights and the European left. In so doing, it is necessary that we remember the past, and define the point of understanding that we as left democrats have now reached. I would like to dedicate my remarks to Anna Politkovskaya and all those people who have taken risks, including that of their own lives, for the freedom of expression.

Thirty golden doves, made by an artist from Augsburg, have been sent out, each to commemorate one of the articles of the Declaration of Human Rights. Christian Führer from Leipzig let me have the dove representing Article 19 for four weeks. After a time, I passed it on to my long-time friend Armin Schubert, who in turn gave it to Foreign Minister Steinmeier to commemorate Article 19, which says:

- > "Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression; this right includes freedom to hold opinions without

interference and to seek, receive and impart information and ideas through any media and regardless of frontiers."

## **THE LEFT PARTY AND HUMAN RIGHTS**

The path leading to the following precise, well thought through and very demanding sentences on the issue of human rights in the Programme of the LEFT Party has been long and painful, and rent with controversy, both internally and externally; moreover, it unfortunately became possible only after the failure of the Soviet-style socialist model:

"Freedom and social justice, democracy and socialism are contingent on one another. Equality without individual freedom ends in incapacitation and heteronomy. Freedom without equality is freedom only for the rich. Those who oppress their fellow human beings are not free either. The goal of democratic socialism, which wants to overcome capitalism in a transformational process, is a society in which the freedom of the other is not the limit, but the condition for one's own freedom."<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Die Linke: Key Programmatic Points.

And the Chemnitz Programme states:

- > “For us, freedom means the possibility to shape our lives and our society, ourselves and together with other. Equality without freedom is oppression. Freedom, equality and solidarity constitute the content of justice.”<sup>3</sup>

Viewed historically, such sentences are not of innocent provenance. The scepticism of political opponents is the result of often bitter experience. Those who have suffered and have lost loved ones due to the violations of human rights of past communist systems may rub their eyes in disbelief. They find such a transformation cynical or implausible. Some of my friends can't understand the fact that I would speak to the LEFT Party. The new LEFT Party or PDS has not tried to downplay the serious violations of human rights, but has addressed them in a multifarious and differentiated manner – be it in regard to political persecution, to the Wall, to ideologisation and censorship, to the Secret Police, to the multifarious restrictions of civil rights, or to the manner in which religions, the churches and believers were handled. In May 2007, the party announced:

- > “We have learned this from history: Respect for the views of dissidents is a prerequisite for liberation. We reject all forms of dictatorship and condemn Stalinism as a criminal misuse of socialism. For us, freedom and equality, socialism and democracy, human rights and justice are indivisible.”

The intrinsically fragile neoliberal capitalist world system needs, now more than ever, a strong, popularly convincing, leftist, democratic left, more willing and more capable of unity, both nationally and internationally. Freedom and justice in solidarity, and individual and social human rights, must continue to be the pillars for leftist political activity. But human dignity is being violated, worldwide, daily and multifariously.<sup>4</sup> It is time to struggle for

respect for human rights with all our strength, all our understanding, and all our hope, and against all hopelessness, nationally and internationally, as individuals, as independent groups, and as countries, both as governments and as their oppositions.

## **HUMAN RIGHTS ARE RESISTANCE RIGHTS**

There are questions which we democrats must agree on if we really want democracy. Human rights are a basis for which we should fight, despite different accentuations, in view of so much hunger and injustice, suffering from war and the horrendous profits of the armament lobbies – upholding human rights means banning cluster bombs and landmines; in view of the lack of clean water, the growth of the deserts and the “efficient” exploitation of nature; in view of arbitrary domination, such as at Abu Ghraib, Guantánamo and almost every Russian prison, and the “might makes right” concept as an unreasonable and ineffective reaction to worldwide terrorism – instead of “international law makes right”; in view of intolerance, militancy, terror and the arrogant attitudes of the rich and powerful nations and cultural areas; in view of the erosion of human rights principles even in the democracies; in view of the power of a profit-obsessed investment community over a human-centred and sustainable politics; and in view of the freedom of the haves against the lack of freedom of the have-nots. It is time to keep our attention focused on these things, while at the same time not losing sight of the magnificent fact that we have the Declaration of Human Rights.

Human rights are resistance rights against forms of injustice and oppression. Their denial must be fought, as must their instrumentalisation in propaganda battles. It is for instance not instrumentalisation if “human rights and democracy” are said, but “oil” is meant; or if wars are justified with transparent lies; if the UN Charter is passed over and single nations are pressured to consent, as was recently done before the Iraq War? Can you remember how the Americans wanted to bribe fourteen nations in the Security Council, including Mexico?

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<sup>3</sup> Chemnitz Programme of the PDS. Party Congress, Chemnitz, October 2003 (in German).

<sup>4</sup> “Human dignity shall be inviolable”, the opening sentence of the German Constitution, and a familiar political principle in Germany.

Fighting for human rights always means focusing on the fate of the individual, but also on the political-structural framework within which life in the community takes place. There will be no freedoms unless free people struggle for the freedom of others who are cheated of their fundamental rights. Human rights require the solidarity of those who are able to enjoy human rights with those whom they are most brutally denied, be it in the Lukashenko kingdom or the Middle Kingdom, be it under Mugabe or in U.S. POW camps.

### A POLITICAL RELIC

I have a political relic which I keep safe. It is a little book which I always kept close at hand, an international instance of appeal for the things which I considered politically right and necessary, and which I tried to realise in the country in which I lived. In 1966, when I was twenty-two years old, this little reference book on the UN was printed by the publishing house Dietz. Anyone who is aware of the extent to which the socialist countries were “religions of the book”, knows that there, whatever was printed was either the truth or else dangerous; sometimes both. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights is published in the book, on pp. 166 *et seq.*; it was adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations as Resolution 217/III, with 48 votes in favour and eight abstentions on December 10, 1948.

The Preamble explains the origin of the Declaration – the “disregard and contempt for human rights which resulted in barbarous acts which ... outraged the conscience of mankind”.<sup>5</sup> Evidently, people must be protected from other people. A world was to be created in which people were free of fear and want, and enjoyed freedom of speech and religion. The essential issue seems to be to protect human rights through the supremacy of law.

What is needed, according to the Preamble, is a “recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family”, a belief which no longer refers to a supreme being, nor to a supreme

human authority such as a Vatican, a Kremlin or a White House. What is needed is faith, in the shape of a power of longing, a force of orientation which operates as a law inherent in every person, and is “deeply anchored”, so as to serve as a buoy in the storms of time. However, this force of orientation can break down at any time: There is no assurance that what happened in Germany between 1933 and 1945 will not recur. What is therefore needed is vigilance on the part of all democrats.

After the Preamble, those fundamental human rights which concern human dignity are listed first. The recently overcome barbarism is always in view; only in Article 22 is the human right to social security stated, followed in Article 23 by the right to work, equal pay for equal work, satisfactory pay, social welfare and school education. Interestingly, the minimum wage is already established here!

### THE – INDIVIDUAL – HUMAN BEING IS CENTRAL

The Constitution of the German Democratic Republic stated: “The human being is at the centre”, people are central for all endeavours. We lived in such a wonderful state which so wonderfully kept watch over us and at the same time watched us so strictly, a state which, with its agencies, never lost sight of the human being, who was tied into the collective, and was cared for within it.

Reiner Kunze wrote a poem about this in 1969. Like the songs of Barbara Thalheim<sup>6</sup>, these simple lines had a liberating effect in a country in which such lines and such songs were not expected. The texts by Reiner Kunze were titled “*Ethics*”:

> “in the centre/ is the human being/ not/ the individual”.

Central to the Declaration of Human Rights is the *individual* person, not an abstraction, a producer or consumer, nor a compilation of societal conditions, and certainly not the human being as part of a collective, a class, a church, a race, a nation, in which the collective

<sup>5</sup> Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

<sup>6</sup> An East German actress and singer who became a dissident.

is all and the individual is nothing, or only a cog, a ball in play, salt, fertiliser or the repeater of slogans. Human rights always means the individual and his or her basic, overarching equal rights and equal dignity and equal claim to life, regardless of gender, race, religion, origin, talent, possessions or position. The poor person is a whole person, as is the old person, the sick person and the child. In this sense, equality not only precedes freedom, but is the condition of freedom. Equality does not mean, here, the sameness of all people. We are dissimilar and yet equally worthy, and that gives us the right to develop ourselves. Thus do human rights which are universal, both in that they apply to all, and that they apply everywhere<sup>7</sup>, human rights which demand "an equal right to life for all", remain a utopia, a motivating, universal, all-comprehensive utopia.

The proclamation of the universal validity contains a problem: Who is to vouch for these



human rights, how are they to be transformed into positive rights, which can be demanded in the legal framework? How are they to be safeguarded and how can we prevent them from becoming a battlefield between different interpretations?

## **INCONSISTENCIES BETWEEN PARTICULAR HUMAN RIGHTS**

Human rights intrinsically involve some unsolved and insoluble problems. First, human rights by implication assume the fundamental equality in principle of all people. However, this cannot be enforced in practice, since, for various reasons, people are in fact very different. Imagine, dear Lothar Bisky<sup>8</sup>, that they were all like the two of us. That would be terribly boring, even though the two of us aren't boring. But that isn't what equality means. Equality in diversity! The separate churches use the term "reconciled difference". That might be something for the LEFT Party, too! The goal can never be administered equality or

<sup>7</sup> Transl. Note: German: universell/universal.

<sup>8</sup> Chair of the LEFT Party.

uniformity; it can only mean equal basic claims for dissimilar people. Such basic claims remain abstract until there are subjects to defend them and communities to codify them, and to strive to translate them into rights to be legally claimed.

The second, even more important basic contradiction is in people themselves. At the centre of the supreme law, that of human rights, is the human being. That can cause us to assume an anthropocentric attitude towards the world, according to which we always judge human life more highly than any other life or other being, and to be always oriented towards the present. That obscures the fact that that life can also be in competition with other values. For example, we today are using up too much energy, and are betting that coming generations will be able to think of something to compensate for what we are doing.

The origin of human rights in European-Atlantic intellectual, cultural and political history, and the Bill of Rights of the American Constitution, demonstrate the great emancipative value the concept of human rights attained and has retained to this day. On the other hand, that didn't prevent the United States from maintaining slavery until the middle of the 19th century, nor the British from running a colonial empire until long after the Second World War.

## **MARX' WEAPON OF CRITICISM**

[The German version of] that anthem which embraces the globe states "The international will win human rights"<sup>9</sup>; yet the world communist movement has unpardonably neglected the basic human rights impulse. In its view, there were only social human rights, to be ensured by the state. In the theory and the political practice of the rigid ideology of Marxism-Leninism-Stalinism and of the all-powerful party, the world communist movement apportioned civil (individual) liberties according to its arbitrary discretion, or stifled them completely.

<sup>9</sup> Transl. Note: This is the final line of the refrain of the most common German version of the Internationale. In English (the most common American and British versions), that line reads, "The Internationale will free (or "unites") the human race".



In his famous introduction to his *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, Karl Marx started with a linguistically gripping and intellectually impressive critique of religion. From his critique of heaven, he derived a critique of the earth, turning the critique of religion into a critique of law, and the critique of theology into a critique of politics. With his critique of religion, he recognised what had entered onto the world stage due to the discovery of individual by Luther and his breaking free of subservience. Protestantism, he stated, while "not the true solution of the problem ... was at least the true setting of it."<sup>10</sup>

There, Marx summarised in an unsurpassed manner what emancipation in the socialist sense means; they are – apart from the option for violence included therein – part of the catechism of human emancipative history:

- > "The weapon of criticism certainly cannot replace the criticism of weapons; material force must be overthrown by material force; but theory, too, becomes a material force once it seizes the masses. Theory is capable of seizing the masses once it demonstrates *ad hominem*, and it demonstrates *ad hominem* once it becomes radical. To be radical is to grasp matters at the root. But for man, the root is man himself. The manifest proof of the radicalism of German theory, and thus of its practical energy, is the fact of its issuing from a resolute positive transcendence [*Aufhebung*] of religion. The critique of religion ends in the doctrine that man is the supreme being for man; thus it ends with the categorical imperative to overthrow all conditions in which man is a debased, enslaved, neglected, contemptible being."<sup>11</sup>

You, comrades, should all be able to recite that!

The human being, the individual, is where theory demonstrates itself in practice. Socialism is

only that which people experience it as in practice. At issue is not merely the negation of religion, in which the human being, as the child of God, stands supreme over nature, and of course has a still higher being above him. The human being himself becomes supreme, and, as himself the highest creature in the eyes of human beings, the result is a mutual process of building great respect for one another, the supreme valuation of humankind, which submits to no higher being, called upon to subdue all (external) conditions in which a human being cannot be human, where he becomes a debased, enslaved, neglected and contemptible being.

Marx was concerned with external conditions. The fundamental error of the practice of the socialist world movement was that Marx essentially based himself on external conditions and, except in theatrical performances, hardly addressed internal contradictions at all. Let us not forget how long Franz Fühmann, the poet, had to struggle so that the writings of documents of Sigmund Freud could appear "in our German Democratic Republic".

However, it is not only the external conditions which have an impact, but "internal conditions" too, including such internal contradictions and motivations as lust for power and prestige, destructive excess drive, and damage from early childhood with long-term effects, traumas untreated which emerge later, rivalries and obsessions. I recently had a debate with the psychotherapist Hans-Joachim Maaz. He interpreted the present financial catastrophe as essentially due to damage in the life histories of the managers. He is right. The managers are ill. But they find available to them a system in which they can live out their "illness". Political, economic structures are the "other aspect". How did Brecht put it – "Caesar beat the Gauls. Was there not even a cook in his army?"<sup>12</sup>

So let us return to Marx' wonderful imperative. Marx was convinced that the emancipation of humankind must and could emanate from

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<sup>10</sup> Karl Marx: *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, Trans. Annette Jolin & Joseph O'Malley, Introduction.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

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<sup>12</sup> Bertolt Brecht: *Poems, 1913-1956*, "Questions from a Worker who Reads," Methuen London/ Routledge NY, 1987.

Germany. Thus could he close with: "The emancipation of the German is the emancipation of man. The head of this emancipation is philosophy, its heart the proletariat."<sup>13</sup>

Soon, the party stepped into the place of the Third Estate, into the place of the masses of suffering people, pronounced itself the vanguard, and assumed power to be exercised at its own discretion. The ideas of emancipation, human-rights, freedom and human solidarity remained awake among certain individual "comrades", even in the cadre party. Upstanding Communists would not put up with having others enslaved and degraded once again. I am thinking here of those who fought against Franco in Spain. Many who survived were killed under Stalin. Erich Mielke<sup>14</sup> wasn't one of them.

The statement that the human being *per se* has equal rights and equal dignity is a postulate dependent on agreement. It is an assertion than needs no further justification, which can, however, provide none itself. Therefore, we have agreed not to interpret Article 1 of our Constitution<sup>15</sup> further, for any interpretation would lead to yet further interpretations, which would water down the basic principle and undermine this inviolable statement. There must be such a thing as statements which are simply true.

## WHO SANCTIONS HUMAN RIGHTS?

Human rights are not legitimised by any authority outside humankind. That is their greatness, and also their fundamental "point of connection" for non-religious and for the religious of all faiths on this earth. Precisely that, however, is their limitation and also a danger. For who is the authoritative subject that proclaims and sanctions basic human rights as laws, universally applicable for all, and everywhere?

This problem appears even in *Exodus*, the second book of Moses. In a critical situation, the charismatic leader Moses climbs Mount Horeb (Sinai) in search of a higher authority for the rules of life, and after a longer silence, returns with the table bearing the Ten Commandments, to his people, weary of privation. Horrified, he sees that they have created a new authority in his absence: They have cast a golden calf, and are now dancing around it.

Self-subjugation under wealth and power, under the authority of gold bars, is a universally familiar pattern. The problem is that there are a lot of things we would change if we were infinite. If we were infinite, we would say: "Not this again!" But we are finite. There is a wooden sign set up by the survivors of the Ravensbrück concentration camp. It says, "We won't forget you!" The survivors are no longer here, now. The sign is rotting. There is no longer anyone left to say: "We won't forget you!"

## THE STATE AND HUMAN RIGHTS

The civilisational catastrophe of the Second World War led, ironically or logically, to the drafting of the UN Charter and later to the Declaration of Human Rights. It was promulgated to provide a general legal basis for the prosecution of the perpetrators of future wars of aggression and human rights violations, be they individuals, countries or blocks of countries. How difficult that was and is to legitimate in terms of legal philosophy, is obvious and becoming more so every day; consider the trials against those responsible for the massacres in Yugoslavia, Rwanda or Darfur. Consider the legal defences of Karadžić or, before him, of Milošević, it is obvious that it can be difficult to punish crimes under the rule of law. The same is true of the kidnapping of Adolf Eichmann: formally, it was an infringement of international law, but so too was the permitted sojourn of Eichmann in Argentina, unpunished. While the trial of the ice-cold bureaucrat of the Holocaust was conducted according to the rules of due process, it still cast a light on the dilemma of national sovereignty, which permitted Eichmann to reply to his prosecutors

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<sup>13</sup> Marx, op. cit

<sup>14</sup> The East German cabinet minister in charge of the secret police (Stasi).

<sup>15</sup> Transl. Note: Basic Law for the Federal Republic of Germany.

that he was “only obeying orders”, and had “only done his duty”.

The question remains, as to the extent to which states may intrude onto the legal systems of other states, and to which they can, *ex post facto*, condemn that which was once “legal” in those states. Hans Filbinger<sup>16</sup> went so far as to say: “What was legal at that time cannot be illegal today”. We have a problem here. Who can legitimately condemn whom, where, and on what legal grounds? Today, there is a disinclination to arrest the pirates off Somalia. They have no other perspective in life. No one knows on the basis of which law and at whose expense they are to be arrested and taken into custody.

Human rights remain the only buoy of the world civilisation. The list of the failure of human rights is long: the Korean and Vietnam wars, the Congo and Middle East wars, the Afghanistan and Iraq wars. Despite the many failures, we want to pursue violations of human rights everywhere on earth, with sensitivity, awareness and determination.



The most serious violations of human rights are not due only to the organised mutual killing of soldiers, but also to “collateral damage” run rampant. This term, in use since the Balkan Wars, is a cynical piece of obfuscation. Do universal human rights still count for anything, if the dead of New York are so infinitely more important than the – uncounted – innocent casualties of the war in Afghanistan against the Taliban? Who would rein in and impose criminal prosecution upon a great power when

“might makes right”, and a place like Guantánamo can be built and run? Nor does the very dubious practice of the death penalty exactly legitimise the USA as the leading advocate of human rights. With his attempt to revive the “American dream” in the best sense of the term, Obama is taking up a difficult inheritance, if he survives that attempt.

Human rights are *not* an ideological, moral chimera when they are directed towards the weak and their rights, such as children’s rights, the right to bread, minority rights, woman rights etc. The quasi-*a priori* nature of human rights referred to above is what constitutes their weakness and what must be appropriated anew by every generation, with its convictions, as well as by means of laws grounded in law and in society. Basic human rights claim a virtually liturgically religious status, repeated and engraved upon us again and again, so as to be applicable in the long term, and especially in ever recurring conflict situations, such as in ethnic conflicts. Human rights are always fragile, and must be renewed by each generation.

After the racist barbarism of the Nazis, the mothers and fathers of the Constitution apparently grasped this, and placed that solemn sentence in Article 1 ahead of everything else:

- > “Human dignity shall be inviolable. To respect and protect it shall be the duty of all state authority.”<sup>17</sup>

It is the duty of the state to protect human dignity; the citizen is not there to protect and support the authority of the state, and to obey it. The state is a support facility for the highest being, the human being, whose dignity shall be regarded as inviolable.

Article 1 Paragraph 2 then goes on to identify the problem, which is that the state as an abstraction is to protect something which at first glance also appears to be abstract: “human dignity”.

- > “The German people therefore [i.e., because human dignity is inviolable] acknowledge inviolable and inalienable

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<sup>16</sup> State premier of Baden-Württemberg, who in 1978 was forced to retire due to this statement, and the allegations which sparked it – death sentences against deserters during the last days of the War, for which he was responsible.

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<sup>17</sup> Basic Law for the Federal Republic of Germany, op. cit.



human rights as the basis of every community, of peace and of justice in the world.”<sup>18</sup>

How many Germans know these two sentences? And how many know what they mean? Here, the German person as a whole is being claimed as a community of belief which views inviolable and inalienable human rights as the basis for a prosperous human community, and for peace and justice in the world!

## THE PRACTICE OF HUMAN RIGHTS

Human rights are and will remain a permanent challenge of education and appropriation. UNESCO project schools are a special component of this effort, as are children’s and young people’s galleries, like those of Armin Schubert in Brandenburg. Here, children typeset and print key sentences of the Declaration of Human Rights, letter for letter, sheet for sheet. In so doing, an internalisation of these basic values takes place. Theatre plays, too, can be a form of appropriation. If you have ever acted in *Antigone* or in *Andorra*, you will have emerged transformed and marked. Christian churches, too, have a not insignificant share of this, if they function as open and determined communities in the spirit of the Son of Man from Nazareth, and as door-openers for a culture of compassion for all people.

But even more important than any intentional education is what young people see, hear and learn daily in their environment. The word “*bekennen*” [to confess, profess, acknowledge] describes the entire complex of problems. It is a religious term. *Credo* means “I confess”. To confess to something means to bear witness for it, to support it and to stand up for it, body and soul. If the German people were to no longer confess to this, everything would be hollow and empty, until it were corrupted, twisted and forgotten. Human rights will persist only as long as a community of people organised in a state, feels obligated to the applicability of these human rights, and recognises them as the basis for their community and for the community of nations. As soon as

such inner recognition disappears, the state will find it difficult to uphold human rights. However, it will on the other hand find it easy to neglect fundamental standards, or even, if it appears opportune, to smash them.

We are witnessing this in Greece today. Something has built up there. The young people no longer believe in the competence of their democratic system to provide solutions. Mentally, the police have remained fairly authoritarian. If the military were to come back, the police would be the first to impose a dictatorship. We also need a police force which thinks reliably democratically.

I’m also referring to our German debates around the weakening of the right to political asylum, to the search possibilities of the new Federal Police Law<sup>19</sup>, to the justly mocked “Otto catalogue”<sup>20</sup> of terror-prevention provisions limiting freedoms, but also to so-called active euthanasia. Without the belief of the citizens in the inviolable validity of human rights and without the active vigilance of the citizens in favour of the concrete protection of basic human rights, these human rights would be daily endangered.

Another fundamental problem arises from the fact that so-called civil, or individual, and social human rights exist together, parallel and in contradiction to one another. To put it provocatively: What is the position of the right to freedom in relation to the right to bread? In his parable of the Grand Inquisitor, Dostoyevsky<sup>21</sup> described impressively how they can be played off against one another for the sake of power politics. The Grand Inquisitor sends Jesus, who has descended from heaven, back up again, because he and his fundamental view of humankind is simply not needed for the preservation of power and prosperity, and for the oppression necessary for that purpose. A Grand Inquisitor must crucify again and again, and, as a realist of power, repeatedly

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<sup>19</sup> Transl. Note: German: BKA-Gesetz.

<sup>20</sup> Otto Schily, the Social-Democratic interior minister under Chancellor Schröder, submitted a proposal for combating terrorism after 9/11, which received this spoof name referring to “Otto”, Germany’s most popular mail-order catalogue.

<sup>21</sup> In *The Brothers Karamazov*.

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<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

displaces the Saviour, with the gentle, merciful, forgiving, conciliatory, non-violent, understanding, frank, open, completely non-devious look of the Son of Man. The stupidest calves choose their own butchers.<sup>22</sup>

### THREE FALSIFICATIONS OF THE MARXIST CLASSICS

The left, particularly the Marxist-trained, bolshevistically ideologised left embedded in a Marxist-Leninist *Weltanschauung*-community, suffered terminally from three basic falsifications of its own "Holy Bible", its highest instance of appeal, the so-called "classics". The first falsification consisted of the at first glance harmless movement of an adjective: "Freedom is a bourgeois swing". What Marx wrote was simply: "Bourgeois freedom is a swing". But the edited sentence damaged that shining word "freedom", and subjected it completely to the omnipotence of the party and its totalitarian claim to define truth, a party which had set out to lead the masses, and in so doing had, "in the interest of the cause", left virtually no crime unperpetrated.

A second falsification referred to the individual, and point to the core of human rights, a falsification which remains incomprehensible, in view of the fact that all of them had read the Communist Manifesto forwards and backwards, yet had overlooked a little something which was to be of momentous consequence, and reached the public in East Germany only by way of Stephan Hermlin's *Evening Light*<sup>23</sup>. What Marx and Engels had written was:

- > "In place of the old bourgeois society, with its classes and class antagonisms, we shall have an association, in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all."<sup>24</sup>

But what was written in the ideology, in the textbooks and what was embedded in the heads of all those who underwent regular "red

light treatments"<sup>25</sup> and Marxism-Leninism seminars? "The free development of all is the condition for the free development of each." That is the disastrous precedence of the collective over the individual and of the mass over the subject – aside from which Marx and Engels had an association in mind on which the free development of all – individuals – would be the goal.

The third disastrous falsification goes back to Friedrich Engels, who – seemingly – smoothed out the eleventh Thesis on Feuerbach only linguistically, by inserting a "however". Marx had written: "Philosophers have hitherto only *interpreted* the world in various ways; the point is to *change* it."<sup>26</sup>

In Marx's view, a different interpretation cannot be completely excluded; however, the task of philosophers must be specified to the effect that their thought be carried out with the intention of changing the world. The result in practice was that Marxism-Leninism (-Stalinism) was seen as the only scientific *Weltanschauung*, and all else nothing but preliminary philosophical rehearsal, including the simplistic and broad-brush categorisation into materialists and idealists, the division into progressive and bourgeois philosophy, etc. The result was by and large a philosophy which amounted to party scholastics.

It should also be mentioned, for it is not quite insignificant, that the truth expressed in the third Feuerbach Thesis was not applied to the communist movement, the thesis being that the circumstances of people are changed, and that "the educator must himself be educated". Later, that became the shibboleth that the party was always right, that the teachings of Marx were all-powerful and true (according to Lenin), and hence, too, all the red slogans. And all that in a socialism which, after the violent suppression of the Prague Spring, was proclaimed to be "real existing socialism", and, stripped of any utopian character, degen-

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<sup>22</sup> Transl. Note: A common German political bon mot; the German word for "to choose" also means "to vote".

<sup>23</sup> Fjord Press, San Francisco, 1983.

<sup>24</sup> Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels: Manifesto of the Communist Party.

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<sup>25</sup> Transl. Note: An East German slang term for workplace propaganda lectures.

<sup>26</sup> Karl Marx. Theses on Feuerbach; an English version of the Engels edition on this site does not contain any "however" or similar word in the 11th Thesis.

erated into a historic dictatorial power concentration, often to undisguised “Stasi-ism”

Frightful was the effect of Marx’ thesis that the human essence is not an abstraction inherent in each individual. “In reality, it is the ensemble of the social relations.” Marx thus contradicts in the *Feuerbach Theses* his own reflections on the individual in the *Economic Philosophical Manuscripts*. In East Germany, this was consigned to the poison cabinet<sup>27</sup> until 1968!

## ROSA LUXEMBURG’S WARNINGS TO HER OWN PARTY

Rosa Luxemburg wanted the humanisation of human relations, and the abolition of war and exploitation, and on the other hand, saw completely clearly what the dictatorship of a handful of people and the self-appointed power of the Soviets as the only true representation, to the exclusion of general direct elections, would lead to:

- > “...but with the crushing of political life in the land as a whole, life in the soviets must also become more and more crippled. Without general elections, without unrestricted freedom of press and assembly, without a free struggle of opinion, life dies out in every public institution, becomes a mere semblance of life, in which only the bureaucracy remains as the active element. Public life gradually falls asleep, a few dozen party leaders of inexhaustible energy and boundless experience direct and rule. ... an elite of the working class is invited from time to time to meetings where they are to applaud the speeches of the leaders, and to approve proposed resolutions unanimously – at bottom, then, a clique affair – a dictatorship, to be sure, not the dictatorship of the proletariat, but only

the dictatorship of a handful of politicians...”<sup>28</sup>

In her work on the Russian Revolution, Rosa Luxemburg names names: Lenin and Trotsky (she could yet know about Stalin). And based on concept of humankind and her concept of herself as a politically active woman, she considered it indisputable that “without a free, unrestrained press, without an unhampered network of organisations and meetings, particularly the power of the broad masses of people is completely unthinkable.”<sup>29</sup> For her, party programmes are “a few big signposts” which show the directions. It is, in her view, the very nature of socialism that it cannot be imposed, that it absolutely needs public control.

In this context, we should consider that remark which was to lead to a mass series of arrests in January 1988<sup>30</sup>, a remark which was allegedly written as a note in the left margin, without connection:

- > “Freedom only for the supporters of the government, only for the members of one party – however numerous they may be – is no freedom at all. *Freedom is always and exclusively freedom for the one who thinks differently*. Not because of any fanatical concept of ‘justice’, but because all that is instructive, wholesome and purifying in political freedom depends on this essential characteristic, and its effectiveness vanishes when ‘freedom’ becomes a special privilege.”<sup>31</sup>

Rosa Luxemburg is exceptionally clear-sighted with regard to the temptations of power, to the rapid loss of human rights, and to the clever heads in the leadership, who expect only “uncritical admiration and eager imitation”.<sup>32</sup> She trusts in the critical judgement of the masses, and feels confronted with the task “to concern

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<sup>27</sup> Transl. Note: An East German slang term for the restricted shelves at libraries, containing politically suspect works which could be obtained only with special permission.

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<sup>28</sup> Rosa Luxemburg, *The Russian Revolution*, Chapter 6, “The Problem of Dictatorship”.

<sup>29</sup> Own translation from Rosa Luxemburg: *Gesammelte Werke* (collected works), p. 355f; specific work unk.

<sup>30</sup> Transl. Note: Dissidents joined the official annual commemoration of Rosa Luxemburg’s murder with signs bearing this quote (italics), and were arrested and exiled.

<sup>31</sup> Luxemburg, *The Russian Revolution*.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

oneself with a critical analysis of the Russian Revolution in all its historical connections."<sup>33</sup> She sees how rapidly power swallows the fundamental rights for which the battle has been waged.

Socialist or leftist thinking must always remain critical of power, and must focus not only on the political competitor or opponent, but must also include self-criticism."

To be sure, every democratic institution has its limits and shortcomings, things which it doubtless shares with all other human institutions. But the remedy which Trotsky and Lenin have found, the elimination of democracy as such, is worse than the disease it is supposed to cure; for it stops up the very living source from which alone can come correction of all the innate shortcomings of social institutions. That source is the active, untrammelled, energetic political life of the broadest masses of the people."<sup>34</sup>

But what then appeared in the *Rote Fahne*<sup>35</sup> on December 14, 1918, ninety years ago, was nothing but an attempt by the Spartacist League to violently seize complete power – in the name of the popular masses. The Spartacist League, "the socialist conscience of the revolution"<sup>36</sup> and "political power", to wit: "the entire political power," which aims at "the dictatorship of the proletariat and therefore true democracy."<sup>37</sup> This last thought determined the Soviet socialism model, and without further ado proclaimed the Dictatorship of the Good to be "true democracy".

Alongside this pathos of superiority and this disastrous claim to sole representation stands, then, wholly unconnected, that great statement:

- > "The proletarian revolution can reach full clarity and maturity only by stages, step by step, on the Path of Calvary of its own

bitter experiences in struggle, through defeats and victories."<sup>38</sup>

## **ROSA LUXEMBURG AND THE UNITY OF HUMAN RIGHTS**

The heritage of this clear-sighted socialist thinker, whose entire orientation was towards freedom and the self-development of each individual, and at the same time of all, must be upheld, without being heroised. It is her prison letters which reveal so impressively the human being behind the revolutionary. Had she not been murdered in 1919, she would have had to flee Germany by 1933 at the latest, and would have been shot in 1937 at the latest, or died in the Gulag. These are truths we must face.

In Rosa Luxemburg, we have before us an instance of appeal for the unity of individual and social human rights. If the LEFT Party speaks of human rights, it should never forget what has been perpetrated in the name of the liberation of humankind. Human rights must be protected strictly as a shining treasure, in the belief that they are important, that they must be maintained, and that they can take legal shape.



The most monstrous crimes were committed in the name of this great idea of emancipation. Stalin also stands for systemic problems. As a left democrat, it is necessary to consider the works of Shalamov, Rybakov, Tendryakov and also Solzhenitsyn or the *Black Book of Communism*. Only now are the enormous losses and crimes involved with Mao's legendary, mythologised "Long March" of 1934-'35 coming to light; not to speak of the Cultural Revolution and the terror of the Khmer Rouge. After the Second World War, the bourgeois-liberal intellectual world was able to connect in many ways with its democratic-socialist counterpart, after they had stood together in the battle against the Nazis, and had learned from

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid, Chapter 4, "The Constituent Assembly".

<sup>35</sup> Organ of the Spartacist League and then the German Communist Party during the inter-war period; "Red flag".

<sup>36</sup> "What Does the Spartacus League Want?" in *Rote Fahne*, 14 Dec. 1918, Section V; (original title: "Was will der Spartakusbund?").

<sup>37</sup> Ibid, Section III.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid, Section V.

the fragmentation of their forces in the fight against Franco.

## ALBERT CAMUS'S WARNINGS TO THE LEFT

With great intellectual clarity and human incorruptibility Camus has held together what has often fallen apart in the use of the word "human rights": the right to freedom and the right to bread. Camus refers on the "dawn of the first freedom and the most enormous hope which this world has ever known." He laments that this most enormous hope in the world "has ossified into the most efficient dictatorship in the world." Freedom and bread are equivalent values; each is lost without the other.

- > "For even if society were to change with one blow, and offer everyone decent, comfortable conditions of life, but there was still a lack of freedom, it would still be barbarism."

That is a kind of human rights pathos, which the European left could well afford today. "Only one single slogan can still be useful to all of us today: never yield an inch of justice, and never be satisfied with less than full freedom."<sup>39</sup>

Camus knows exactly that liberties must always be fought for and won, and that Caesarism can return in all possible historical guises, yea, that the separation of freedom and justice amounts to the separation of culture and labour. Camus upholds bourgeois (individual) freedoms as much as he does the social demands which one can and must make upon life:

- > "Choosing freedom does not mean choosing against justice, as some would have us believe. On the contrary, we are today choosing freedom only at the level of those who are always suffering and fighting alone – there and there only. We are choosing it together with justice, at the same time, and indeed, it will in fu-

ture really no longer be possible for us to choose one without the other. If somebody takes your bread away, he is also depriving you of your freedom at the same time; however, if somebody deprives you of your freedom, then know that your bread, too, is threatened, for it will depend not on you and your struggle, but on the capriciousness of some lord. The more freedom loses ground in the world, the more misery grows, and conversely. ... The oppressed want to be freed not only from their hunger, but also from their lords. They know very well that they will really escape their hunger only when they are able to keep their lords, all their lords, at bay."<sup>40</sup>

In his conversation about the assessment of the Hungarian Uprising of 1956, he writes under the title "The Socialism of the Gallows",<sup>41</sup> about the task of the left which must not cling to the lime-twig of slogans, and should renounce the temptations of all ideology.

- > "The left is schizophrenic, and must seek a cure in relentless criticism, exercises of the heart, firmness of thought, and also in a little modesty. None of the evils which totalitarianism – primarily manifested in the single party and the abolition of all opposition – pretends to remove is worse than totalitarianism itself. Without freedom, there is no socialism, unless it be the socialism of the gallows."
- > "Real existing socialism" existed in oblivion to this simple truth, to this knowledge, outlived its time, and pulled the term "left" down with it.

Thus, among the tragic mistakes and omissions is the fact that the left, wherever it was in power, was interested more in power than in the principles for the sake of which it had seized that power. The communist world movement, as it emerged in the Soviet Bloc and in the great Chinese empire, in principle

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<sup>39</sup> Albert Camus: "Defence of Freedom", in *Resistance, Rebellion, and Death*, Vintage, 1995. [Transl. Note: All translations our own.]

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<sup>40</sup> In this great essay "Bread and Freedom" (*ibid*), Camus says that freedom means primarily not privileges, but duties.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid*.



took up the demand for the equality of all; however, it ran over anyone who got in the way of its power or the party line, mercilessly and lawlessly. The “socialist countries” (with or without quotation marks!) allowed human rights to be brought into play against them as a weapon, as it were, in the Cold War, because they restricted civil liberties and denounced them as anti-socialist, because they feared losing power. In the shadow of the arms race, the primacy of peace, too, degenerated to a propagandistic slogan.

### HUMAN RIGHTS DURING THE ERA OF DÉTENTE

It would be wrong to deny the significant efforts made by the socialist countries, particularly in the post-Stalin era: that everyone had affordable housing and work, that everyone participated in education, culture and social opportunities, that the power of people over people based on of the bottom-up redistribution of wealth was abolished, that the power over the means of production was essentially in societal – in practice, however, in state – hands, that peace and friendship between nations with no racial barriers became a supreme principle.

These principles were ideologically and propagandistically occupied, and the list of restrictions is not only long, but also painful. How arbitrarily were political trials instigated and conducted, how degrading was the penal system, how inhumane the censorship, how restricted the freedom of thought, of assembly, of association, of speech, of writing, of the press, and of conversation! How little space for individual development was there, and how strong was the inner-party opposition against the dictates of a party, the representatives of which could not exactly be considered the intellectual core of the nation – especially in the case of the gerontocratic Politburo of the Socialist Unity Party of Germany.<sup>42</sup>

Human rights could not be made to disappear as an issue, and during the détente negotiations became the bone of contention par ex-

cellence. In Article 2 of the East-West German Basic Treaty of December 21, 1972, it is stated that the two German states “will be guided by the aims and principles laid down in the United Nations Charter, especially those of the sovereign equality of all States, respect for their independence, autonomy and territorial integrity, the right of self-determination, the protection of human rights, and non-discrimination.”<sup>43</sup>

The entire problem which was in the foreground until the collapse of the Soviet bloc is contained in this article: the cohabitation of sovereignty, respect for independence and non-intervention in internal affairs (also defined as the “right to self-determination”), with the cross-border validity of inalienable human rights. The argument was that communist party power fell under the heading of the “right of self-determination of nations”.

The fight for human rights continued throughout years of tough CSCE negotiations, and finally led to the Helsinki Final Act in 1975. The west particularly gained attractiveness for the peoples of the so-called Warsaw Pact countries, since it had fought for compliance with human rights. The Soviet Union and East Germany had both signed the Final Act, including “Basket III”;<sup>44</sup> and felt safe in doing so, thanks to the principle of non-intervention, but they underestimated the strong desire for freedom on the part of the citizens of the socialist countries, which now broke into the public light thanks to intellectual circles in Budapest, Moscow, Warsaw, Prague and Berlin, to the labour movement in Poland, to “Charter 77” in Czechoslovakia, and to the independent peace and human rights movement in East Germany. The inner delegitimation of the states of the Eastern Bloc occurred to no small degree due to the denial of human rights, particularly the political right of self-determination, and including all civil liberties, such as free access to other countries and to information.

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<sup>43</sup> Basic Treaty between the Federal Republic of Germany and the German Democratic Republic, December 21, 1972.

<sup>44</sup> Helsinki Final Act, Basket III: Co-operation in Humanitarian and Other Fields, easing of people-to-people contacts across the bloc divide, exchange of information, Helsinki, August 1, 1975.

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<sup>42</sup> SED, the official name of the East German Communist Party.

A reflection of today's situation: evidently, people appreciate democracy more, the longer it is withheld from them, and the more unbearable the regimentation is. In freedom, people quickly become indifferent and easy-going, and the majority support democracy to the extent that it makes prosperity possible. The choice between freedom and bread always comes down in favour of bread, regardless of how it is obtained.

In order to realise the extent to which East Germany was internally crumbling as early as 1979, one might consider the tightening of the Criminal Code and its sanctions of that year, particularly the articles concerning so-called "treasonous transmission of information".<sup>45</sup> Accordingly, the dissemination of information which was not subject to secrecy, but which was disadvantageous to East German interests, was punishable by two to twelve years in prison. The article on "anti-state agitation" (§ 106) threatened one to eight years for producing, introducing, disseminating or posting of "documents, objects or symbols for the purpose of the discrimination of social conditions, of representatives, or of other citizens". Other articles which deserve mention included "formation of a mob" (§ 217), "association for the pursuit of illegal aims" (§ 218), "illegal establishment of connections" (§ 219), and "public derogation" (§ 220). The door was opened wide for arbitrary political prosecution. The Criminal Code is a catalogue of horrors, especially considering what the conditions of custody for political prisoners (and others) were like, how they were tormented emotionally. Many of them suffered long-term damage. Finally, we should not forget the so-called "disintegration measures" directed towards oppositionists and groups, which Mielke promulgated half a year after the signing of the Helsinki Final Act. The memory of such things makes one glad to have left this system behind. I am happy about that every day, although I do not ignore the Herculean tasks we face today, tasks for which a strong democratic left is so necessary.

The socialist world system which had established itself as an alternative to capitalism, and for a while assumed a position of near equality with the western world in the competition of systems, perished only partially due to the economic problems stemming from the attempt to simply suspend the laws of the market, rather than shaping and reining it in. It also failed because of its far-reaching renunciation of the other half of human rights, those inalienable rights to freedom. The system cheated itself out of the creative potential of its own societies.

## PATHOS FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

However, it would be demagogic to accuse the socialist countries of having completely abolished all human rights *in toto* and at all times. They cut human rights in half. But human rights apply either completely or not at all. A self-confident leftist human rights movement, borne by its memories and experiences, should remain focused on the spirit of Helsinki and on that excellent Charter of Paris (1990),<sup>46</sup> which was tossed into the political waste bin, so as to remain instructed and motivated by bitter experience and at the same time by wondrous developments. And it is the significance of the spirit of the Charter 77 (1977) which can unite all democrats, even today.

To fight for human rights means to need such pathos, which, certainly, means having ever to ground itself anew in the course of its political fulfilment, as soon as one tries to formulate it into a legally enforceable right. To fight for human rights means to need a surplus of utopia, and an ideal toward which one moves. Pathways always emerge when one treads them.

None of us knows where we are to be found in the capitalist world system, after the establishment of deregulation, turbo-capitalism, and worldwide neo-liberalism. Capitalism is currently in a nearly uncontrollable situation.

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<sup>45</sup> Cf. Criminal Code of the GDR.

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<sup>46</sup> Charter of Paris for a New Europe. Meeting of the Heads of State or Government of the Participant States of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE), Paris, November 19-21, 1990.

## **ROSALUX-EUROPA # 1 // JAN. 2009**

Times of crisis are always times of threats to human rights. Everyone feels that we are on a slippery slope, and doesn't know yet where it will end. The faster the money came, the faster it's collapsing. Greed is inherent in all of us, and has, in global capitalism, found a system which is proving to be a gigantic house of cards, collapsing on the poor and the rich countries alike, on the interests of peaceful reconciliation, on the assets of nature, on all understanding of the climate catastrophe, and on all commonality in the fight against terrorism and its causes. We need more human rights pathos in our countries and more UN as a community of nations in the one world again. More humility. And also rage, which becomes courage. In spite of it all.

Ed. Birgit Daiber

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