

# Justice or Barbarism

## International Conference "Justice or Barbarism" of Rosa Luxemburg Foundation in Berlin, 5th and 6th, October 2000

Almost one year after the blockade of Seattle and just one week after the annual meeting of the International Monetary Fund, Rosa Luxemburg Foundation will hold in Berlin the Justice or Barbarism conference.

It will provide a platform for the cry for justice: **Injustice must be denounced!**

the search for justice: **There are alternatives!**

the fight for justice: **Resistance is required!**

### **Injustice must be denounced!**

The global community faces a radical change. Over the past 10 years, the relative stability of the post-war order has given way to an upsurge of technological, economic, political and cultural changes of such fundamental importance that one can rightly speak of a "global revolution".

Changes of this dimension put on the agenda the alternative of "justice or barbarism". It's not so-called factual constraints that decide on the future but human beings and organisations they have created. In the course of social change, rights and duties, claims and entitlements, chances and risks are fundamentally redistributed. Contrary concepts of freedom, equality and justice collide. The criterion for measuring them is the fate of those most severely discriminated in contemporary societies. Economic, political, cultural and even military power is used to influence the allocation process. What does this mean for the lives of those who have little or no power at all?

The results the global change process has produced so far are dramatic: 348 individuals own the same amount of money as 2.7 billion people. In Africa alone, 31000 children die of famine every day. Global environmental destruction has become an actual threat affecting, in today's world, billions of people. 70 % of the world's poor are females. Worldwide, they do two thirds of the work but only take home one tenth of the pay. For growing parts of the population, the welfare state of Western industrial countries has departed and left them in a state of permanent unemployment or working poor. The explosion of revenues from fortunes of the upper fifth of the population meets its opposite effect in stagnant or shrinking incomes from wages and salaries. In terms of social justice, the global revolution has become a social counter-revolution.

The effects of the current change process will be predominant for substantial parts of the 21st century. To guarantee a live in dignity for all, duties and rights, burdens and affluence in this world have to be distributed in a fair manner. It is necessary to make real the entitlement of all people, in all their diversity, to equality and to effectively exerting their political, economic, social and cultural rights and, thus, to maintaining themselves in freedom. These are global rights and they are valid through generations. To achieve an increase in justice, it is required to make, in the first place, the benefits of all the benefits of those who, so far, have been particularly disadvantaged.

The collapse of European state socialism was nothing but the beginning of dramatic institutional changes in all regions and the global community. Framing the chance processes in a fair and just manner requires fundamental restructuring of economic, social and political systems. New power sharing mechanisms and new forms of social, ecological, economic and civic regulation will have to be established. This will also require developing new conceptual definitions of progress.

### **There are alternatives!**

The global change has, once again, very distinctively raised the social issue with its dimensions of up and down, North and South, men and women, today and tomorrow. However, alternative answers have not yet been put on the table. But they can and must be found. This raises many difficult questions. Here are some of them:

Can the slogan of securing national/regional competitiveness be exposed as a misconception? What alternatives to take action within social security systems do exist? How can these be linked to self-determined and fair working and living patterns which contribute to overcoming the gender-specific fragmentation of the labour markets and the prevailing division of labour at work and at home? How can the new trends of increasing hierarchic division of labour between

women be opposed? Do concepts aimed at providing basic social security mean to bring utopia into real life or do they just serve to justify low wage systems? Can the provision of basic social security be justified in a worldwide context or does it mean to further fortify "Fortress Europe"? Can an economic theory, which equates benefit with money instead of luck, continue to form the basis?

What could be the first steps to reduce or stop injustice? What could be alternatives which are realistic and, nonetheless, do make a change for the people concerned? Is it about the right of all to efficiently gain from capitalism or something beyond? How can self-determination and just allocation be achieved? How can environmental protection and production of goods be brought together without becoming just another power instrument of the North against the South? Where are people discriminated because of the colour of their skin or for gender reasons? What does highly unequal distribution of power and powerlessness mean for democracy? What does it mean for the image of this world that more than 50 percent of its largest economic entities are no states but transnational companies? Will famine, malnutrition, lack of education and health services, and unemployment of billions of people continue to be part of the collateral damage in a system incapable of drawing a line between exploitation and the right to exist? Do we believe in Margaret Thatcher's slogan "TINA" - There Is No Alternative? Or do we, after all, still need utopias and visions about how to arrive at more justice in this world?

### **Resistance is required!**

Rosa Luxemburg Foundation's "Justice or Barbarism" conference is in keeping with the tradition of Rosa Luxemburg's passionate commitment to linking equality with freedom. Almost unparalleled in Germany, she opposed the upcoming World War the results of which have affected the entire 20th century and facilitated the rise of totalitarian dictatorships. Earlier than many others, she warned not to sacrifice freedom to "the great equality". She paid with her life for her unwillingness to accept the alliance between German militarism and the emerging German republic.

The new feature about the demonstrations against the WTO and, prior to that, the Multilateral Agreement on Investment (MAI) - which not least failed because of the protest - is the globalisation of resistance. Instead of a call for protectionist solutions, Seattle saw the solidarity of Canadian postal union activists, Mexican maquiladora workers, Indian peasants and US steel workers. Local and regional resistance begin to unite in a global effort.

Global capitalism determines the lives of people in different regions and of different ethnics, gender and classes. The presence of their (often painful) experience - invisible to the world's upper class hiding behind increasing share prices and the walls of their enclaves - will be the focus of the conference. Therefore, we will invite people with most different background and from different regions. Accordingly, we thus express our confidence that answers can only be found together - answers which - as the Zapatist rebels in the Mexican forest put it - make it possible to create a world "which gives room for many worlds".

### **We invite you!**

The "Justice or Barbarism" conference shall be organised and carried out together with the women and men participating in it. Our aim is a dialog across cultures, borders, parties and philosophies of life. The conference will offer an international platform to activists of social movements, politicians, artists, scientists and the interested public for mutual understanding and productive dispute as well as a common search for strategies to build a just world.

We call upon initiatives, movements and groups, men and women, to make proposals for the concrete agenda and the way of organising the "Justice or Barbarism" conference not later than the beginning of June. From your proposals and an accompanying discussion process a final proposal will be elaborated on the organisational structure of the conference, its main items, panels and public activities. Should you accept our invitation, we are looking forward to your contributions.

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