



**THE  
DEMOCRATIC  
MODERNITY**

A manifesto for change

**WANDEL**

***Ours is a changing world.***

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# Prolog

# In the 21st century Global Capitalism has reached even the earth's remotest corners. The crises, wars, and environmental disasters that we are currently experiencing are symptoms of its unresolved distributional conflicts. People, animals, the environment, and democracy – we accelerate everything and subordinate it to markets and profit. Those who cannot keep up are left behind. This is the world that we have built with the incredible technological possibilities of our times, with the bitter experience from two world wars and the unprecedented opportunities of globalization.

# For a short period, the direction that European societies were headed seemed promising. Democracy, social security, or education was increasingly available to the masses. But just when we were thinking that the fight was won, that reason had prevailed, the elites – those who direct and profit from Global Capitalism – fought back. Prosperity has rendered us comfortable and apolitical. We forgot that it can only be achieved and sustained by constant political fight. Turning their backs on the people, old mainstream parties came to terms with the elites and withdrew into administration. Robbed of our political representation today we are confronted with our own shortfalls.

# Irreversibly our world is turning global. But so far politicians have neglected to build democratic structures that are capable of acting at an international level. Thus the elites of Global Capitalism are able to push through their global interests. Over people's heads, across borders and at break-neck speed they drive politics more and more into a defensive position. Having failed to develop a credible alternative model, the room for maneuver of national parliaments is fading.

# Stranded with allegedly no alternatives, we are headed for both a practical and an intellectual impasse. Instead of striding into the future, our societies remain collectively powerless and isolated. What shapes our political and social lives now is an increasingly individualized fear: fear of poverty and unemployment, which our politicians consciously accept in exchange for the profits of the economy; fear of refugees who flee conflict created by today's politics; fear of our own personal failings within the system.

# For a long time, we have been watching our politicians' machinations and believed in their purported strategies and practical constraints. We bought into their stalling tactics when they sacrificed our freedom, equality and solidarity for the profits of the economy. But we will not accept their attempt to make us fear the future itself; because every different future inherently needs the freedom to invent itself. First and foremost today this means to be free from fear.

# We write this manifesto because we are ready to take sides for this freedom. The best time to take a stand is now.

# Democratic Modernity

# The future starts with democracy. Time and again we as societies have fallen victim to the fundamental error of trusting the economy rather than democracy with our future. But this is just how we inevitably put the markets and profits above the general good. We have always ended up paying for this fallacy with freedom and quality of life; but still it is firmly in our heads. Blind faith in the markets has also shaped the conception and programs of the old mainstream parties. Politics has come to be a mouthpiece for global economic interests and robs the large majority of the people of their political representation. The primacy of politics is close to being lost for good.

# Democracy is front and center to the freedom to invent our future ourselves and together evaluate new solutions to the challenges that lie ahead. What renders democracy so special is its understanding that the rules for our shared existence are neither without alternative nor predetermined by nature, but instead socially constructed and therefore changeable. It recognizes that our world offers a bigger variety of perspectives and solutions than any one group can grasp, let alone control. Thereby democracy is the foundation of any civilized shared existence and simultaneously the only way to reach it.

- # Democratic modernization is the main task of progressive politics. We must resuscitate democracy as a core concept of society and revolutionize its implementation. The specific challenge of Democratic Modernity is to reconcile the frequently lengthy processes of democratic community with the speed, complexity and geography of our times. Only then can it enforce its rules in a globalized economy and reinstate the primacy of politics.
- # We are aware that today, politics can only be understood and shaped internationally. The old politicians' insistence on national identities only obscures the elites' interest in preserving their power. Knowing this, when working in local contexts we always have to consider the global dimension. Only this way can we finally articulate cross-border interests and develop a vibrant political practice that allows politics and democracy to operate on the global stage.
- # We learn as we go, ready to take our requests to the institutional center of democracy: The parliament. The politics we strive for requires huge boosts of democracy. By this we do not mean more direct democracy for a pseudo-political grass roots individualism that refuses real political engagement. What we demand in and from our parliaments is transparent accountability in the legislative process as well as clearly defined rights to a say for civil society and science.

- # But much more than this is necessary to manage the enormous step to Democratic Modernity. Beyond the parliaments, democracy needs room, time, and calmness to reason, listen and assess. To empower people to be able to find and express their political stance in today's environment of complex conflicts we need a radically new approach towards education. Those who are asked to objectively voice and confidently demand their desires and rights first have to be given the opportunity of critical emancipation.
  
- # Let us not forget that media, too, are a central pillar of any democracy. They shape both private and public opinion. Today, a few media corporations and their commercialized propaganda direct the general public and make politics a commodity. Plurality of opinions is an essential part of democracy. Therefore, it is necessary to limit the power of commercial opinion makers and to publically support media that rise up to their democratic responsibility to educate people and to induce social debate about the major issues of our times.
  
- # The democratic public sphere also has a virtual side. The internet and soon artificial intelligence, too, pervade our everyday life and change it radically. But technological progress is never neutral. The existence of a Democratic Modernity therefore also depends on how we as societies can utilize the possibilities of the virtual world. How to keep personal data safe or how to ensure access to knowledge and information are questions that touch the fundamental democratic rights of any future society.

# Even listing only these few examples of necessary steps towards Democratic Modernity shows the complexity of the tasks and challenges ahead. And yes – there are going to be many more. But let us be honest with ourselves: The only thing that prevents us from starting to take the first steps today is our fear – instilled by the current political landscape. Moreover, many believe that without the perfect plan, change is not possible. But we would not be where we are if it had not been for many generations before us who proved the opposite. There is no such thing as the perfect system. That is why change is a path, not an answer. If we want to set out towards a more forward-looking world, nothing prevents us from starting today.

*Change is a path,  
not an answer.*

# Abandoning capitalism

# Capitalism owes its attraction if not to its promise, then at least to the expectation of many, that it fosters a better future. This expectation cannot and will not be met. Capitalism's need for ever-growing profits forces never-ending expansion, the materialization of everything, and the escalation of existing inequalities. Today, nearly only those who have rich predecessors are themselves rich. They make the rules. Global resources and wealth are concentrated in their hands. Corporations, the super-rich, and the financial industry can conduct their business largely without having to pay attention to democratic processes or the interests of the people. Their sheer size allows them to evade regular competition and tax duties. Instead, they squeeze profits and returns from the system in a dimension much larger than could be generated in the real economy. Increasingly dangerous speculative bubbles ensue, the costs of which are eventually imposed on the general public. This recurring and integral part of Global Capitalism is at the heart of the current crises.

# Even in Europe we can no longer ignore this system's social and ecological cost. We observe Global Capitalism continually penetrate new spheres of society and subjecting them to profit-seeking and competitiveness. In consequence we see our daily lives becoming increasingly labor and resource intensive; we watch social polarization and precarity rise, we witness empty treasuries and ruthless exploitation of our ecosystem.

Nothing and nobody is immune to the economization that is taking place. Even human beings are mere resources. Fear of not functioning well or fast enough is proliferating, for those who do not make or spend money are not part of the capitalist calculation and in the end equate to nothing more than a burden.

#We do not want to live in a world like this. We do not want to subjugate ourselves to a system that only works if profits rise. The pressure for ever more economic growth now openly contradicts its own promise of continuous improvement of living conditions for everyone. Even health, the environment and peace are subordinated to it. The original idea of growth as the engine of social progress has been refuted by reality.

#During a crisis another problem arises: the desperate clinging to the capitalist growth strategy buries any thought of freedom, equality, and solidarity, let alone of any revolutionary technological aspirations beyond the limits of our planet. Therefore it is time to abandon Global Capitalism and to turn towards a new, positive model of the future: The Good Life for all. Within this model, the common good is not a by-product; it is the direction that we want to steer and grow our societies. This does not exclude economic growth, but it gives us the opportunity to get rid of its pressures and to put the focus of social progress on our quality of life.

# This reorientation is a terrific opportunity for our societies. One thing that we can learn from history is that whenever people have invoked the values of Enlightenment, they and their societies have excelled. We know that our pursuit of more democracy is a fight on many levels. Accessibility will be the key for new politics to initiate a public debate on a different future and therefore to rise to its biggest challenge: to abandon Global Capitalism as the dominant social system.

# The Good Life

# The democratic alternative to the capitalist way of life is the Good Life – for us, for the people we love and for everyone with whom we share and will share our planet. The Good Life for all is based on social security, health, a sound environment, satisfaction at work, and time for relationships, family, and friends. It applies to everyone and therefore pushes for possibilities of independent participation and the recognition of equality for all. At the same time the Good Life allows for room for curiosity about the unknown as it is not a final state but a guiding principle for the success of democratic societies. It is the base for a new social cohesion that allows us to pursue our personal happiness in freedom and without fear.

# To those who doubt this concept: It is true, the Good Life means something different for each and every one of us. Nevertheless it is wrong to think of it as a private matter; for freedom either applies fundamentally to all or no one. The political project of a Good Life for all therefore needs a firm commitment to a democratic set of rules including objective and measurable goals for equal opportunities, a sound environment, social mobility, fair wages and working conditions, and much more.

# Let us not underestimate how deep the capitalist rationale has been ingrained in our thinking. This prevents the urgently needed change of perceptions towards a focus on our joint future. Capitalist egoism, competitiveness, and inequality are presented to us as social progress. The common good is being pushed aside. To free our politics from the constraints of the capitalist forces we need to stop numbing ourselves with the consumption of useless stuff and start developing a collective perspective on the Good Life for all.

*There is only freedom  
if it applies to all.*

# Democratic Economy

# Needless to say, Democratic Modernity also has to prove itself within the economy, for without a functioning economy there is no Good Life for all. Although we are ready for a radical change in our economic system, we do not belong to the group of people who want to abolish markets altogether; they can well exist even without capitalism. Our aim is to reconcile the economy with the values of Democratic Modernity and to align it with people's needs. In order to do that we need to fundamentally address the relation between ownership and its present legal claims.

# For one thing, there is no reason why it should be possible to make private profits from providing society with basic services that people indispensably need for a Good Life. After decades of radical free-market politics this might sound unusual, but in the past it was taken for granted that many sectors were controlled by the government: Education, health, pensions, security, infrastructure, as well as highly volatile sectors of systemic importance like banking, insurance, or energy. In the 21st century, we will have to democratically determine if the provider should be the state or a new form of organization that manages general interest. In the end, our success will depend on whether we can protect these sectors from patronage and too much bureaucracy.

# We have no intention of limiting the entrepreneurial spirit. But by letting big corporate groups flood the markets with seemingly cheap goods produced by exploiting humans, animals, and nature, this is exactly what happens: The innovative capacity for the economy is being strangled. To advocate for more democracy and fair competition can change this and open up thus far unknown possibilities. Therefore we want to radically disclose hidden social and ecological economic costs and to reflect them in prices and regulations.

# For a real system change we also need changes in ownership structures of corporations. We have to get rid of the internal democratic deficit of corporations and to acknowledge how their business decisions affect the general public. It is the employees of corporate groups who should take fundamental decisions regarding location, manufacturing processes, or corporate management. In addition we need global anti-trust rules and effective trans-national tax laws that prevent global corporate groups from gaining illegitimate power outside of our democracies because of their size.

# The most important step towards Democratic Modernity concerns the realm of work. Questions of how we organize, distribute and remunerate work touches our lives more than any other political issue. Today it is only the elites who benefit from increases in productivity. The large majority of people compete with machines and people in countries with lower incomes for their jobs.

In a Democratic Modernity people here and there will share the earnings that they generate and radically reduce their working hours while wages rise. In the future machines still will and should take over more and more of our work. The only thing of which we need to make sure is that everyone benefits from the time freed up and the earnings made. We do not advocate for this only in order to increase consumption, as many argue, but to free people from the balancing act between burnout and unemployment and to recover independent control of personal time.

# Let us not forget that an important part of our work takes place outside of formal employment. Social work, parenting and nursing care, or pro bono work – our societies would quickly come to a halt without this work being done, but still mostly it is not paid. We need to readjust the value attributed to them. This does not mean pricing in and paying for any human interaction but to start a new public debate about work and fair distribution. In order to bring our societies in line with people's fundamental social and ecological needs we have to free ourselves from the dictates of wage labor. The major lever to do this is to allow people to live on work that might not generate a profit but creates social value.



*Democracy is the foundation  
of any civilized modernity.*

# Our path

- # Notwithstanding the importance of a thorough analysis and clear layout of our vision, we need to address the inevitable question: How? How do we start a democratic modernization, yes, revolution?
- # Our goal is clear: In order to champion a Democratic Modernity we have vote on it. Ultimately, we have to take it to the site where we as a society negotiate our future: The parliament. Of course, parliament is not the only place where our history is decided upon. Countless men and women promote change in many other realms. But as long as we negotiate and legally validate our laws in our parliaments we cannot ignore them or give them up to those who sacrifice our future for the well-being of the elites. In the medium term we have three goals:
- # One: Publicity is a necessity when it comes to debating specific alternatives to Global Capitalism's hegemony. We are building an interdisciplinary network that formulates and strengthens our economic and social vision for the Good Life and that links it to institutions and material resources. This network has to be able to facilitate different opinions and to channel them into a common position to challenge the elites' power.

# Two: We are starting to build a political alliance that encompasses a wide range of progressive views and translates them into a structure capable of implementation. From the start this structure needs to be guided by transparent rules for decision-making, an open culture of cooperation, and democratically secured forms of civic participation. Our goal is to establish this alliance as a learning political organization that is, both with regards to content and organization, able to effectively change the political discourse and to successfully participate in elections.

# Three: We do not cherish the illusion of being able to implement our goals in parliament without an elected majority. Therefore we will not waste our time with pointless debates with the old mainstream parties. In and outside of political institutions we will use our energy, our financial means, and the political stage to professionalize and to make the viability of our ideas an everyday reality by practical interventions and democratization projects.

# Epilogue

- # We will no longer be tricked into thinking everything is fine when we know that it is not. While Global Capitalism uses all of the resources for the luxury of its political and economic elites, the majority is robbed of their future. Real social progress towards the Good Life for all can only be achieved by Democratic Modernity. Let us no longer pretend that we will be able to reach it without overthrowing the elites.
- # This is all there is to say. Now it is time to follow our conscience and to openly take sides. We are not the first to do this and we will not be the last. United in our vision and free in our approaches we walk with the millions.

*Together we have nothing to lose  
but our fear.*

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