

A stylized world map composed of a grid of dots in various shades of gray, with several dots highlighted in red. The map is centered behind the title and authors' names.

# At the Limits of Growth

## The Promise of New Progress

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- The traditional fixation on economic growth led modern society into the current crisis and will also lead it into the next one unless fundamental change occurs.
- Hitherto, the notion of growth has gone hand in hand with constantly increasing resource consumption and an ever-increasing burden on the biosphere. In order to maintain social progress and social cohesion, a new type of wealth production is required as the basis of a new progress.
- The growth imperative must therefore be repudiated. The new model must observe the principles of sustainable development that underpin the economy both socially and environmentally. The social mitigation of restructuring will be possible only with a strong welfare state, however.
- Within the framework of the new progress, the provision of collective goods will play a greater role, preventive social policy must be extended and remedial social policy stabilised. All areas of the economy and life must be designed so that energy consumption and emissions are minimised. Furthermore, a new mobility paradigm must be shaped and sustainable agriculture advanced. The central task of progress should thus be the redistribution of power and wealth, both nationally and globally.





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Preliminary Remarks<sup>1</sup>

We define economic growth primarily as the type of economic growth which developed in the modern period, above all the nineteenth century, which dominates until the present day. It goes hand in hand with an increase of resource consumption and an ever-growing burden on the biosphere. This means that, if we want to avoid the irreversible destruction of the biosphere, we must abandon this course.

We are aware that current economic theory understands growth increases in monetary terms, as gross domestic product, in which the market value is reflected as the sum of all goods and services produced in a certain period of time. Whether a consistent environmental policy promotes or restricts growth in this sense remains an open question. Furthermore, the widespread belief that growth must inevitably increase harmful emissions and is therefore undesirable for this reason alone, is not correct from the economic perspective.

However, prior attempts at (partial) *dematerialisation* have not been very encouraging, as was made clear by the last global financial crisis, whose consequences have by no means run their course. Nevertheless even in the many respects attractive vision of a post-industrial service society cannot possibly meet all desires for growth. There are a number of reasons for this:

*First*, the proponents of this concept of growth start out from the extensive privatisation of public institutions and services in the areas of health care, education and security. However, this is by no means desirable with regard to secure supply of energy and equal treatment of citizens.

*Second*, the shift of economic activities to the provision of immaterial services will probably collide with the time budget of consumers who should be involved in the provision and planning of these services.

*Third*, it must be considered that many people would prefer to have more leisure time, in which they could pursue their own interests, than to work longer and more intense hours in order to purchase more and more services.

We focus in this position paper on what we think is to be done in the face of the unmistakable crisis of the existing growth model. Activities which contribute to the destruction of the biosphere must shrink fast, while anything which helps to repair environmental damage and to prevent damage in the future must be strongly promoted. This demands not only a change in our lifestyles, but also a process of restructuring of the economy – especially in the industrial sector – which in many areas promises to boost growth and employment. What in the end the economic results of the proposed change of course will be; whether it will lead to an increase in GDP or not – only time will tell.

However, we are convinced that we can do what is necessary only if we divest ourselves of the *compulsion* to pursue growth at any cost. Angela Merkel’s statement that »*without growth everything is nothing*« is simply a declaration of political capitulation. Anyone who thinks that we need more economic growth with the expected increase in government revenues in order to solve environmental and social problems will inevitably continue to rely on the old growth model and thus only exacerbate the existing problems. The necessary change cannot be triggered or implemented in this way.

In conclusion, I would like to thank the authors and members of the Basic Values Commission, Natascha Kohnen, Michael Müller, Elif Özmen and Johano Strasser, for their work on this statement of views and for their efforts to incorporate in this paper the criticisms and ideas arising from the discussions of the Commission.

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1. This paper has been originally developed as a position paper by the Basic Values Commission of the SPD National Executive.

# 1. Change Is Unavoidable

## 1.1 New Epoch

The mega-theme of the coming years, which will be decisive in determining Germany's future potential and challenging social democracy is the following: how is it possible to maintain social progress and social cohesion with limited growth which is decisively smaller than the one previously maintained. We are convinced that the actors with ideas and strength for the socio-ecological restructuring of economy and society will shape the political debate in the coming years.

A new era has begun. The path pursued by modernity, above all its model of progress instituted in the nineteenth century, is based on domination of nature and unlimited growth. A central political aim since the last century has been the highest possible growth. Growth was the only answer for the problems of the present and the sole basis of hope for a better future. But previously growth has gone hand in hand with a constantly increasing consumption of resources and with the ever increasing burden on the biosphere. There is no question that this path of progress is over. Regardless of whether we admit it or not, the ecological limits of the previous form of growth have been reached: it has become less feasible in economic terms and social tasks can no longer be satisfied, if they are still to be dependent on the high growth model.

The fixation on growth has led modern society into the current crisis and it will also lead it into the next one unless a fundamental change occurs.

Because:

- For the sake of more economic growth excessively high greenhouse gas emissions, which are harmful to the environment, are tolerated.
- Drinkable water, cultivable land and important raw materials are becoming scarce. Peak oil calls into question transportation based on fossil fuels and thus the modern form of individual mobility.
- The financial crisis of 2008 occurred because the American and British stagflation at the end of the 1970s was stimulated by the liberalization of financial markets.

Although it led to the expansion of the money economy, the dominance of the banks, and the dictate of the stock exchanges and a permanent import or export surplus led by short-term growth impulses; it also created an imbalance, which inevitably resulted in the collapse of 2008.

- Public debt is growing not only because of inadequate revenues, but also because of increasing expenditure arising from unemployment, demographic change and a weak economy. The result is an accelerating debt spiral, but also dependence on the world market and on high growth.

Growth in its existing form further exacerbates the problems. After a long period of ascent, the unleashing of powerful forces, the increasing independence of the economy and the vast dissemination of technological power over nature, imminent demise and collapse has become a realistic prospect.

We do not give up the belief in progress, but realisation of freedom, emancipation and prosperity today require new approaches. We must enter a new phase of the Enlightenment in order to end the neglect of nature and to break with the delusion of boundless and undifferentiated growth.

### Environmental, Economic and Social Limits of Growth

According to the *Living Planet Index*, we have witnessed in the past 35 years a loss of almost one-third of our biological wealth, in forests, rivers and seas. Sixty per cent of ecosystems are severely damaged, since the 1980s the pollution has been significantly above nature's ability to regenerate.

On top of all this, by mid-century there will be nine billion people on earth. If all of them are to achieve the standard of living currently enjoyed by the OECD states, the world economy must grow fifteen-fold and forty-fold until the end of the century. This is simply impossible.

Twenty years ago, global climate change could have been stopped with warming at 1.5 degrees Celsius. Today, it seems highly unlikely that global warming will remain below the critical 2 degree limit. By 2050 greenhouse gas emissions must be reduced by 90 per cent: in the past

decade, however, harmful carbon dioxide emissions have increased by 30 per cent.

Metals such as gallium, lithium or rhenium, which are crucial for the construction of aircraft turbines, batteries and solar cells, are dwindling rapidly. Since the early 1990s, the »supply of vital resources« has been on NATO's task list. If there is no environmental transformation, conflicts over energy and resources will be the main causes of violence, terrorism and war.

The limits of growth are also identifiable economically, not just environmentally. Since the 1970s, growth rates in the industrialised countries have been decreasing from decade to decade. In the future, they will be even lower, particularly since growth in recent decades was often growth on credit. Paying for the rescue measures instigated during the financial crisis in Germany alone would require growth of much more than 6 per cent a year over the next 18 years.

Between 1998 and 2008 – the year the financial crisis hit – Germany achieved average growth of 1.5 per cent: in the 1960s it was 4.5 per cent. Today, the OECD states are exhibiting only linear growth, if any. Nevertheless, the financing of social systems, employment policy and the stabilisation of public finances require a significantly higher growth than that achievable. As a rule, the target is between 2.5 and 3 per cent.

Nursery schools, schools, universities, sports facilities, means of transport; theatres, opera houses and libraries all depend on growth, which is progressively diminishing. The Lisbon Agenda, too, assumes annual growth of 3 per cent. But this target is clearly not achievable in industrialised Europe. Such a figure is even more absurd if one assumes the continuation of the old growth model. In that case, a twelvefold increase in the volume of goods would be necessary in the course of a generation.

The hope for more jobs through higher growth is also delusional. As the analyses of economist Arthur Melvin Okun show, many industrialised states since the 1990s have had the kind of growth that does not create decent jobs since the increase in labour productivity has far exceeded growth rates. In response to rising unemployment the low-wage sector has been expanded. In this way the so-called employment threshold was lowered,

but as a result the gap between rich and poor has increased.

### A New Role for Europe

The old continent, the »Grand Hotel Europe«, stands on the brink of the abyss if it is not thoroughly renovated. Change in our model of progress is not only crucial for the sustainability of Germany and Europe, but could also serve as an example for the socio-ecological development of the world.

Otherwise, global conflict over growth and redistribution worldwide will become almost unsolvable. The aspiring emerging countries, understandably, are doing what the rich industrialised countries have done before: growth, at any cost. And they have every reason to do so, since the countries of the global South need strong material growth of their economies and infrastructure if they are to guarantee their populations decent lives.

Without control of the financial markets, a new approach to manufacturing and more equitable distribution there can be no progress in the future, either nationally or internationally.

Take China. It is the world's most populous country, but despite double-digit growth in recent years, around 500 million people live just above or below the poverty line. As a consequence of its huge population and strong economic growth China is now the world's biggest energy producer and the biggest emitter of carbon dioxide (CO<sub>2</sub>), even though one Chinese person annually gives rise to »only« around 4.3 tonnes of CO<sub>2</sub>, while an American is responsible for almost 20 tonnes. But China too must cut CO<sub>2</sub> emissions in half by mid-century if the global climate is to be stabilised; therefore, emissions must not exceed 2 tonnes per capita.

### The Great Transformation – Part Two

In Europe and the USA there were early warnings about the dangers of an independent economy. Even today, the question of the embedding of the economy in society remains the decisive difference between conservative and social democratic politics. US President Franklin D. Roosevelt founded the welfare state with the New Deal,

which he described as the »social discipline of economic freedom«. Behind it lies a fundamental conflict.

During the Second World War, when large parts of the world were virtually a battlefield, Viennese economist Karl Polanyi wrote *The Great Transformation* (1944) in which he tried to explain, looking back over the previous 200 years, how the catastrophes of the twentieth century came about. His point of departure was the profound transformation of Western societies from feudalism to capitalist commodity production.

The consequences of this process, which he named »the great transformation«, were the detachment of the economy from society and the predominance of the market. Polanyi writes in this context about the emergence of a »market society«. The specific rationality of the market transformed the »natural and human substance into commodities«. The result of the pervasive capitalisation of society is a »double movement«: the encroachment of the market system on society, the pervasive economisation of all areas of life, triggers alienation and crises, while the resistance of the people unsettles the political system and calls democracy into question. The »disembedding« of the economy from social relations was the reason why the economic crisis developed into a crisis of civilisation. The failure of politics, which failed to counteract this development, almost inevitably led the world into the great catastrophes of the twentieth century.

Polanyi deduced from this that the stability of the economy depends on institutional structures and value-oriented actions that must be aimed at the public good. The welfare state of the post-war era, which was not a charitable giveaway, but a political prerequisite for a functioning market economy, took this insight into account.

Social democracy was, so to speak, an elevator which enabled all social strata to climb continually and kept society together: »prosperity for all«. The basis of this successful era was the combination of economic dynamism with the dynamism of the democratic social state. The success of this strategy is the main reason why many people to this day equate economic growth with progress.

With falling growth and open markets, the old conflicts broke out again. From the end of the 1970s Margaret Thatcher (from 1979) and then Ronald Reagan (1980) reacted to falling growth rates with the »demoraliza-

tion« of the economic order in the hope of achieving new economic impetus after years of stagflation in the US and British economies. Neoliberalism transferred the command over the economy to the banks. The result was financial capitalism. As a consequence, the trade unions were weakened, national oligopolies were roughened up, the economy was deregulated and social spending was cut.

In pursuit of more growth the report of the Club of Rome on the earth's finite resources was also sidelined. Finally, the industrialised countries eagerly adopted the deregulation of financial services introduced by London and Washington and placed themselves under the guidelines of the so-called *Washington Consensus*.

The independence of the economy was pushed to extremes. The result was not only a radical shift of power and income in favour of certain small groups, but also more rapid depletion of social and natural resources.

Due to the triumph of neoliberalism and the money economy, which were supposed to stimulate growth, politics and society became subordinated to a voracious capitalist »land grab«, not only inside nation-states, but also from outside. One example of this is expansion of capitalism to the territories of the defunct Soviet Union and of post-revolutionary China.

The liberalisation of global markets led once again to massive shocks, which continue to deeply unsettle people. Nevertheless, even the worldwide financial crisis, the ramifications of which have yet to be exhausted, has brought no real change in thinking. Since most politicians cannot even conceive of an alternative to a high growth strategy Germany's »black and yellow« (CDU, CSU, FDP) government responded to the growth crisis with a law aimed at accelerating growth (*Wachstumsbeschleunigungsgesetz*). This represents another attempt to use political means to call in once again the old growth model as a solution, a model which demonstrably led to environmental and social catastrophe. The danger here is that, for the second time, we will find ourselves pursuing the same course Polanyi described in *The Great Transformation*.



1.2 What Kind of Progress?

Just like many other central concepts of modern times – compare, for example, the notion of Enlightenment (*Aufklärung*) and relate to it religious imagery of light such as illumination (*Erleuchtung*) – »progress« originally had a religious meaning. In the Christian linear conception of time progress was understood as the path of moral purification: the Christian’s path to God. From among the many writings which testify to this early conception of progress John Bunyan’s *Pilgrim’s Progress* (1678) is particularly apt. Progress – whether in the religious or the secularised sense – is possible only through the replacement of a cyclical view of time by a linear one. This is one of Judaism’s greatest achievements, which Christianity adopted.

Modernity retains not only the linear conception of time, but also – in essence – the interpretation of progress in terms of salvation, although it is applied in the secular realm. Progress has come to mean broadening and deepening of knowledge, ever greater mastery over nature, growing prosperity, gaining freedom, equality, fraternity and, initially at least, moral improvement.

At the latest since the eighteenth century scientific, technological and economic developments are understood in terms of this-worldly progress. It is the solid foundation of progress: everything else is derived from it as possibility, consequence or superstructure. Accordingly, the politics of progress is essentially the promotion of scientific, technological and economic progress. For an early political liberalism and in particular for the social democratic workers’ movement, although mainly in dependence on the basic process, it has also meant social, political and cultural emancipation.

Norbert Elias adds an important component to this model of progress: disciplining and civilising work on the ego. In his epochal *The Civilising Process* (Zürich 1939) he tries to show that the progressive rational mastery of instinctual impulses and their aesthetic reshaping were of the greatest importance for the formation of European modernism. Social control and self-control for Elias are the essential reasons behind the superiority of European culture over »less developed« societies. Although it was by no means Elias’s intention, from time to time this has been regarded as an additional justification of the dubious underestimation of so-called »primitive« cultures

by Europeans, which was commonplace especially in the nineteenth century.

Contrary to the current widespread historical interpretation of the age of the Enlightenment, inspired mainly by postmodernism, the conception of progress in the eighteenth century was by no means as naïve and homogeneous as it is often presented. The same people who celebrated the Montgolfier brothers’ hot air balloon as the sign of a new scientific-technological modernity also enthused about the »noble savage« and the simple morality of a country life. The same people who exalted reason fell an easy prey for charlatans and faith healers such as Cagliostro and Mesmer. The unwavering faith in science exhibited by the Marquis de Condorcet in his famous *Esquisse d’un Tableau historique des progrès de l’esprit humain* of 1795 was by no means shared by Enlightenment thinkers such as D’Alembert, Diderot or Kant. Furthermore, Lessing, who is supposed to have had a naïve faith in reason, left us with this fine phrase: »He who doesn’t lose his reason over certain things has no reason to lose«.

Only in the nineteenth and at the beginning of the twentieth century did the notion of progress begin to narrow. It assumed among many the form of a self-evident worldview, both among parts of the bourgeoisie and in the workers’ movement, and particularly among the Marxist leaning left.

Under the impact of the achievements of science and technology, previously thought to be impossible, hopes of progress in many places have run wild: complete control of natural processes, perpetual prosperity for all, eternal peace, even eugenic fantasies of the creation of a new, higher type of human being. These are some of the exuberant utopian ideas on both left and right.

The First World War temporarily suspended naïve faith in progress. Oswald Spengler predicted »the decline of the West« and Walter Benjamin interpreted progress as a process of destruction. However, events such as the Russian Revolution once more caught the imagination of many people and the 12–13 per cent growth rates claimed by the Soviet Union even enthused capitalists such as Henry Ford. The stubbornness with which people cling to the idea of progress, although it is by no means an anthropological constant, is indicated by the fact that even after the devastation of the Second World War, racial fanaticism and Stalin’s despotism, the old be-

lief in progress reasserted itself. To be sure, it was now a more sober notion of material progress, oriented principally towards the glittering consumerism of the USA. Things looked up because after war and destruction the only way to go is up. And after several decades of rapid improvement in Germany the saying »my children will be better off than me« soon established itself as the Federal Republic's characteristic principle of hope.

### The Discovery of the Environmental Dimension

There is an implicit assumption that the development of the productive forces is positive under all circumstances. Even the workers' movement – after an initial flirtation with machine wrecking – and, later on, even parties regarding themselves as conservative have become largely uncritical apologists for the industrial growth society based on the assumption that it promotes progress. In this context the evident violence of progress tended to be overlooked: not only the fact that the global dominance of European culture was also due to its superior weapons technology, but mainly the increasing destruction of the biosphere. Only in the 1960s and 1970s did public awareness begin to grow concerning the rebound effects on the environment. Rachel Carson's book *Silent Spring* (1962) and, especially, the Meadows Report *The Limits to Growth* (1972), commissioned by the Club of Rome, shook the complacency of the Western world and spread critiques of growth based on environmental issues. Soon, they found their way into the party platforms of social democratic parties and the newly forming green parties. This was accompanied by a critical reconsideration of technology and its effects on the environment and society. Finally, criticism was renewed about the increasing dissolution of communal forms of social existence and the isolation and strains which this imposes on people.

As a result of all this, not only the conditions of production (ownership, power and rates of distribution) but also the mode of production and, even *ways of life* were called into question. From now on, developments previously put forward as scientific, technological and economic progress could just as easily be regarded as retrogressive in light of a more comprehensive and critical conception of progress. But above all it became obvious that the explosive increase in resource consumption and the equally explosive increase in the burden imposed on the biosphere in the name of the pursuit of »progress«

was restricting future generations to such an extent that their hopes of progress risked annihilation. In the UN's Brundtland Report of 1987 the demand for »sustainable development« was based on this understanding and was established as a global political goal at the 1992 environmental summit in Rio de Janeiro as Agenda 21.

For many theorists, such as Hans Jonas, the experience of advancing destruction of the biosphere due to the plundering of fossil resources and increasing pollution, brought about by modern scientific-technological domination of all life processes has led to a dramatic intellectual turn. In marked contrast to Ernst Bloch's »principle of hope« Jonas demanded a renunciation of modern notions of progress and propagated, keeping with the times, »an ethic of conservation, preservation, prevention and not one of progress and perfection«.

Obviously, older themes also flowed into the critical stance with regard to modernity's conception of progress which has spread since the 1970s: for example, the archaic notion of a *poena naturalis* in response to human *hubris*; Wilhelm Ostwald's environmental critique arising from the second law of thermodynamics at the beginning of the twentieth century; the critique of technology of William Morris, Georg Friedrich Jünger and Martin Heidegger; Rousseau's understanding of the development of modern civilisation as a history of decline; Walter Benjamin and Adorno/Horkheimer's interpretation of progress as a process of destruction; and a variety of Romantic motifs which have accompanied modernity from the beginning as a counterpoint. However, it is a false diagnosis to dismiss all this as a »Romantic retrogress« as, for example, Richard Löwenthal has done. Essentially, the environmental critique of progress from the 1970s is not based on ideological prejudices, but on *experience*, the experience of the mainly thoughtless, but sometimes knowingly harmful consequences of scientific, technological and economic progress which only then – in the 1970s – became unmistakable.

### Radical Market Solutions to the Growth Crisis

After the collapse of the so-called communist or real socialist experiments, which were in fact social experiments with state-controlled economies, political elites all over the world became convinced that high growth rates could be best be achieved by further unleashing

financial capital and radicalisation of market relations. Social Democrats by and large continued to maintain the primacy of politics and an integrated conception of progress, which sought to tie scientific, technological and economic progress to social and human progress. However, a considerable number of them became complicit with the capitalist sectors, which registered the highest growth. In Germany that was and remains primarily export-oriented high-quality manufacturing.

In the last two decades two moments have come forward as characteristic of progress in the globalised world: acceleration in almost every area of society and the *multiplication of choice*.

The acceleration of innovation processes, especially the fact that new generations of products flood world markets at more frequent intervals, is generally presented as welcome progress. However, after closer inspection it reveals serious risks. On the one hand, today there is scarcely any time for what in the 1970s came to be known as technology assessment, while on the other hand expensive developments now often appear unaffordable in the face of shrinking periods of market presence, because the danger increases that consumers may skip a particular generation of products, so-called »frogjumping«.

In the long term, even more consequences could have the »problem of meaning« associated with accelerated innovation. Modernity's logic of progression leads to a situation in which every achievement – and every acquisition – becomes devalued as soon as it is placed because possible improvements or better products that have already been developed catch one's eye. However, if the expected gratification does not materialise, over the long term these achievements will become meaningless.

Modernity's pledge to continually increase the freedom and happiness of the individual by means of the multiplication of (consumer) choice cannot be redeemed in the long run. Agony of choice is a common experience, which is exacerbated by the number of options. Even once one has decided often a nagging uncertainty remains because one can never be sure that one has made the best choice from the plethora of consumer options. The claim that the multitude of consumer options is both expression and means of promoting an individualised way of life does not stand up to examination. Because in

most instances there are no convincing rational grounds for choosing between the countless consumer options, most consumers tend to choose the same things as the large numbers of people in their social milieu. Supposedly »individualist consumers« are generally strikingly conformist. Given that the mushrooming of consumer options is far from guaranteeing happiness and extending freedom, the issue of the cost of this kind of progress becomes more pressing.

The most committed advocates of the condensed progress are to be found among the traditional scientific and economic elites. Self-evidently, they have a strong group interest in defining all the problems that appear in this context in such a way that *they themselves*, with their specific rationality and specific ways of doing things, come to the fore as competent problem-solvers. This interest is not infrequently complemented, concealed and magnified by almost religious belief in the omnipotence of science, technology and the economy, on the basis of which all critical objections are countered with the assertion that, as progress unfolds, every problem will find a technological solution. Inspired by this messianic belief in progress, modern bioscientists have revived the technicist utopia of what historically was known as »the new Man«, including the overcoming of sickness and death.

#### Progress Fatalism or New Progress?

The great majority of people in Germany and perhaps in large parts of Europe, however, do not appear to share such an emphatic conception of progress. Many, perhaps most people in this part of the world have a markedly ambivalent attitude to the promises of progress offered to them by the scientific and economic elites. They doubt that what is being touted as progress will really make their lives easier or broaden the scope of their freedom.

According to a reasonably reliable survey, the great majority of Germans take the view that in the future they, but in particular their children and grandchildren, will be worse off. However, they also generally believe that there isn't much they can do to change this – that progress could be given a different, more beneficent direction. Today, a paradoxical *fatalism* about progress prevails, which can be expressed as follows: progress goes on, but whether or not it is really progressive is highly questionable.

This is a dramatic change of consciousness. Scientific, technological and economic progress has always gone hand in hand with the notion that it liberates people from fateful subjugation and enables them to shape their world and their life circumstances. Today, the unfathomable complexity of global market conditions and the anonymisation of the agents of progress appears to be giving rise to a new fatalism among an increasing amount of people.

If we are right about the debates on correcting the dominant ideas on progress occurring since the 1970s, the critical objections take two different forms: first there are demands to limit technology's access to human and non-human nature on the grounds of moral responsibility for the future of humanity and the biosphere and, second, to subject the dominant model of wealth production – in Marxist terms, not only the *relations of production* but also the *mode of production* – to critical revision.

History appears to confirm that freedom and democracy are possible over the long term only under circumstances of relative material comfort. To be sure, it is important to consider that what is regarded as a *decent life* varies historically with the cultural context. The question concerning future progress is also the question of how over the long term wealth distribution can best be arranged in a society based on freedom. Since the conventional system of production within the framework of scientific, technological and economic progress is not reconcilable with environmental conditions on earth and thus is incapable of producing sustainable prosperity; the rich societies of the northern hemisphere, but ultimately all over the world need a new type of wealth production as the basis of a new progress.

Its key features are as follows:

- (a) Dramatically increased energy and material efficiency; in the medium term the energy transition to solar energy, it means: renewable energies and the construction of an emissions-free recycling economy.
- (b) Wherever possible avoiding damage, rather than subsequently offsetting damage. *Prevention is much better than cure.*
- (c) Instead of more and more goods and services per capita; instead of ever accelerating (product) innovation, us-

ing the gains from rationalisation to create more time at people's disposal which they can utilise as they wish. Meaningful affluence to a considerable extent will be measured in the future in terms of *time*.

(d) Reliable provision of *public goods* (education, security, culture and so on) represents an essential component of future prosperity. The rehabilitation of the public sector is a key element of any concept of sustainable progress.

(e) Prosperity can be created both by paid employment and voluntary activities. For this reason activating *civil society* is a step in the right direction. Generally speaking, play and leisure, collective celebrations and meditation, friendship and love are more important sources of human happiness than mere consumption of goods. The scope for such things can be greatly increased by shortening the time devoted to paid employment.

Based on this transformation of a material base, the central task of progress would remain the creation of equal freedom for all – also through the redistribution of power, property and income – both within societies and on a global scale.

## 2. The Environmental Transformation as the Self-Correction of Modernity

There are champions of an environmental transformation who believe that it could only be achieved by making a drastic break with modernity and its guiding principles. Such positions are generally based on a very one-sided and distorted image of what constitutes modern thought and a modern way of life. We take the opposite view, that a change of course is possible using the cultural resources of modernity, indeed, it is the only possible way. The central features of the culture of modern *rationalism, activism, individualism* and *universalism* by no means constrain the world to continue in pursuit of its present course of relentless economic growth and increasingly destructive consumption of natural resources. The currently dominant economism with its blindness in regard to the ecological conditions of life and economic activity is *irrational* also from the standpoint of Western rationality. We are convinced that citizens of the modern world will be more than willing to take the path proposed here for a new form of progress on the grounds of enlightened self-interest and personal insight.

## 2.1 Environmental Restructuring – A Democratic Path?

The drastic, realized and anticipated consequences of all this – for the natural world around us, for the social, political and economic systems of our life together – raise troubling questions. If our form of life is based on steady, undifferentiated growth which so manifestly is coming up against its limits, are we not facing the prospect of a radical transformation of our way of life and a radical restructuring of our society that could only be carried out in a dictatorial fashion? If our fixation on the unrestrained freedom of the individual has manoeuvred us into the growth trap, how much freedom and in what areas can an individual still claim? Furthermore, are liberal democracies, with their optimism about progress and their promise of permanently growing prosperity for all, in a position to introduce a policy of sustainability?

More and more NGOs, think tanks and individual scientists, as well as anxious or frustrated citizens are coming up with highly questionable answers to these questions. They range from a renunciation of democracy and advocacy of authoritarian policies based on a kind of »eco-dictatorship«, through far-reaching global redistribution, to the complete individualisation of the relevant problems.

*Renunciation of democracy.* Liberal democracies and the promises of progress and prosperity, historically associated with them, are not only the driving force of the direct and indirect destruction of our livelihoods, but also often prove to be particularly ill-suited to solve the ensuing problems. This is evident not only empirically by the regular failure of climate change conferences, in which democracies prove to be no more cooperative than other states. There are also systematic reasons for the problems faced by liberal democracies in policies of sustainability. Thus are the will and decision making in democracies lengthy and cumbersome: opinions must be built and approved publicly, bills must be drafted, introduced and legitimized by parliament. In principle, anyone can have a say and often does when it comes to crucial issues facing society. Furthermore, short electoral cycles in democracies are suitable only to a limited extent for bringing into reality long-term political and legal sustainability programmes. Representative democracies – and Germany is a good example of this – are also highly susceptible to lobby groups pursuing their short-term economic interests irrespective of sustainability goals. Hans Jonas in his

book *The Imperative of Responsibility* (1979) already proposed that »we should even be willing to accept a suspension of freedom for the sake of physical salvation«. More recent contributions emphasise that only a renunciation of democracy in favour of an »eco-dictatorship« could guarantee a clear, carefully targeted and, above all, rapid policy of sustainability, and thus our survival.

*Global justice.* Standard political and philosophical theories of justice are blind with regard to global problems. In particular, the scope of »political liberalism« whose point of departure is freedom and equality, is narrow in terms of both time (it concerns principles of justice for those now living) and space (its principles apply within the framework of the nation-state). In other words, no consideration is made about any responsibility for future generations or for those in need in other countries, especially in the so-called Third World. However, our liberal – Western – form of life, which politically is so keen to drape itself in commitments to »justice« and »human rights«, is founded upon the suffering and exploitation of others, as well as the consummation of their livelihoods and life chances. This is not only a political and moral issue of justice but also a problem with regard to the legitimacy of our own policies. If justice, human rights and prosperity belong together, we can no longer close our eyes »here« to the catastrophic consequences »there« – not least because in this age of globalisation we are jointly responsible for global injustice, human rights violations, poverty and the brutal exploitation of nature. »Redistribution«, accordingly, is not only a moral and political duty, but also a necessary component of a commitment to sustainability: we must transfer our wealth so that the most glaring injustices can be mitigated. We must consume much less so that others can have more. We must use less or make such use more expensive, so that others do not have to suffer disproportionately from the consequences of our form of life. We have to change our lifestyle drastically because it endangers innocent third parties and, over the long term, ourselves.

*Individualisation.* »Green consumption« is the new lifestyle buzzword: health and sustainability are propagated as goals of an individual way of life, which would enable us to evade the imperative of relentless growth. »LOHAS« (lifestyles of health and sustainability) have long since transcended their subversive origins and are now the motor of a whole industry that promises to enable each individual to change the world by shopping. If »grand«

politics is incapable of this, strategic consumption, sustainable purchasing decisions and simple renouncing of small own contributions are. This individualisation and depoliticisation of sustainability brings with it an enormous moralization: no one can escape their carbon footprint, which demands of everyone a radical rethinking of their lives. A transition to sustainability therefore depends less on a political and economic rethinking but rather on an environmental-moral commitment on the part of the individual. Anyone anywhere can make their contribution to sustainability at any time – and they should.

Where there is lack of faith that a decisive turnaround can be achieved, it has been replaced by a postmodern-nihilistic version of individualisation, privatisation and depoliticisation that has recently emerged. We need to be fundamentally sceptical of politics because it is no more than a power-driven interplay of interests anyway. If the individual cannot do anything with regard to global catastrophes; and if the world (or the environment) is not only in danger but already beyond rescue – the self-realisation of the individual as a free market participant supersedes any alleged and hopeless attempts to save the world. At least radical free consumption makes individuals happy in a hopelessly corrupt and uncontrollable world.

One conviction is common to all these positions, be it be the rejection of democracy or the Western form of life, be it the call to an individual austerity or unrestrained hedonism, be it strong politicisation, consciously accepting far-reaching restrictions on personal freedom or be it strong depoliticisation, with moral responsibility reverting to the individual – they all share a common conviction: *the limits of growth mark the limits of freedom!*

For social democrats, the illiberal, anti-democratic conclusions presented here are out of the question. However, shifting problems caused by politics and economics in the realm of private responsibility seems not only futile, but also politically and civically unacceptable. A different understanding of growth and a different relationship to progress are not only desperately needed – but also possible.

## 2.2 Quality of Life rather than Standard of Living

Criticism of the inadequacy of the dominant material conception of prosperity is nothing new. Karl Marx's critique of »commodity fetishism« or Thorstein Veblen's observations on »conspicuous consumption« come to mind. It can no longer be denied that GDP leaves out many parameters of decisive importance for human well-being, such as environmental damage caused by human beings or factors contributing to a person's social decline, including unemployment, social exclusion, divorce and so on. The list of things that GDP leaves out is a long one. As early as the end of the 1960s Robert Kennedy in a memorable speech criticised the fact that »the gross national product does not allow for the health of our children, the quality of their education, or the joy of their play. It does not include the beauty of our poetry or the strength of our marriages ... It measures neither our wit nor our courage; neither our wisdom nor our learning ... it measures everything, in short, except that which makes life worthwhile.«

A policy approach that exclusively or primarily seeks to improve quality of life via increases in GDP is therefore manifestly absurd. Almost no one now disputes this. Empirical research into happiness – for example, by the US-Hungarian economist Tibor Scitovsky – has come to the conclusion that the development of well-being is not correlated with GDP growth. Comparative investigations and surveys in recent years have shown that people in poorer countries – such as Bangladesh, Azerbaijan or Nigeria – are among the happiest in the world. How can this be explained by those who believe that economic consumption is the only way of increasing our sense of wellbeing?

However, if we are to have a reliable measure of the development of quality of life it is not enough to adjust our consumption to take account of their negative effects on the environment and resources. What we really need is to redefine quality of life independently of the conventional model based on standard of living. In 1993, the World Health Organization (WHO) defined quality of life as follows: »Quality of life is defined as an individual's perceptions of their position in life in the context of the culture and value system where they live, and in relation to their goals, expectations, standards and concerns. It is a broad ranging concept, incorporating in a complex

way a person's physical health, psychological state, level of independence, social relationships, personal beliefs and relationship to salient features of the environment. « From this formulation it is clear that a one-dimensional description of quality of life falls short since many – also subjective – aspects are intertwined.

In English-language usage, quality of life is often used in conjunction with the concept of »welfare«, which can be understood in terms of a number of dimensions: examples include hedonism, realisation of preferences or availability of resources. Indian economist and Nobel prize-winner Amartya Sen interprets welfare in terms of »capabilities«, in other words, possibilities for action. Such possibilities are conditional, naturally, on the existence of enabling structures. These must be created politically – in other words, in democracies with the consent of the majority. This opens up new fields of action at the political level since social participation in an active civil society must be promoted so that people can actively improve their own quality of life.

Sen also talks about »positive freedoms« in conjunction with »capabilities«. In simplified terms, happiness and satisfaction do not emerge of their own accord: individuals must commit themselves to that end in manifold ways and be in a position to do so, especially in their immediate lifeworld, such as the workplace or living environment.

With reference to people's autonomous possibilities for action it is hard for a government to create corresponding structures or to avoid impinging on such structures through its interventions. The quality of life of the individual is shaped by needs and desires: government must have the courage to step in here. For example, does an individual need a vehicle for the purpose of mobility – for example, to get to work – or do they really want a certain type of car? If the latter is the case, we are back with Marx and his theory of commodity fetishism. If we continue to cling to the notion of constant growth it is difficult or impossible to improve immaterial quality of life, such as time and social relationships, since, for example, over time social contacts tend to diminish, at least if one adheres to the traditional mobility paradigm. Collective goods such as education, culture and social life represent a junction between immaterial and material quality of life because the competences imparted in the social sphere, in education or in, say, music which are not directly tangi-

ble but give rise to happiness or satisfaction and indirectly facilitate opportunities for advancement.

In addition to the aspects of improving quality of life considered so far, we should not lose sight of the fact that quality of life is also positively influenced by the absence of negative externalities. A simple example is health, which for the WHO is one of the most important indicators of quality of life. Government has an enormous responsibility in this area since it creates the framework for health care, for example, by training health care practitioners or by ensuring equal treatment for all. Agriculture is another – highly controversial – example. GMO farming is considered by many to not be an improvement in quality of life but a risk to their health and a restriction of their freedom of choice with regard to nutrition – and of course food is fundamental to the preservation of life.

### 2.3 A Society Based on the New Progress Is a Dynamic Society

Renouncing the compulsion of growth does not entail standstill and stagnation. It means rather that we redirect social dynamics: from »more and more« to »better and better«, from maximisation to optimisation. The new progress is also a path of progressive improvement and renewal and thus reliant on innovation and the imaginative development of science, technology and the economy. The new parameters of development and the new dynamics of optimisation according to the sustainability model require deployment of humanity's creative powers even more emphatically than the old model of progress.

Furthermore, renunciation of constantly increasing consumption does not mean that we must abandon hopes of a better life. Although we shall have to give up many cherished habits and handle resources with more care, as well as finally taking seriously the key interests of people in less developed countries and of the future generations. But it's not primarily about sacrifice, but rather enlightened self-interest. If we finally learn to accept the limits imposed on us by nature we will discover that what appears to be a sacrifice is in fact a gain. As we become better and better at preventing environmental damage we will be able, without loss of quality of life, to do without many things whose sole purpose is to make up for the made damage, in one way or another. We can adopt a rational approach to the environment *and* live better.

Peaceful coexistence on earth is not possible without a fairer distribution of life chances. Today, an unforgiving global fight for access to increasingly scarce resources. If the advanced industrialised countries insist on continuing their current development paths, bitter commodity-wars will rage with increasing frequency and colossal military expenditure will devour an ever greater proportion of created wealth. If, in response to this, we concede to less developed countries a larger share of natural resources to enable them to catch up, we shall also be doing something for ourselves. We would be investing in our own security and improving our quality of life instead of wasting more and more effort and resources on armaments and war.

On the high level of provision of goods and services, which has now been reached in the advanced industrialised countries, the marginal benefit of further increases in consumption shrink to zero. At least, that is how it is for the middle and upper classes. The internal pacification of society and increases in quality of life will not be achieved by constant consumption growth but by redistribution in favour of the disadvantaged and by more fairness. On the basis of fairer distribution a new model of prosperity could develop in which a *time-based affluence*, creative pursuit of one's own interests and exchanges with other people will play a much more prominent role than the consumption of material goods.

## 2.4 Gaining Time for Restructuring – The First Steps

The most important thing is to gain time to find new ways: there is no going back to the old model of progress. The limits of growth obstruct the old solutions. Another Great Transformation looms. This time it is an even greater challenge. The focus is not only a resumed social disciplining of the economy, but a combined social and environmental disciplining, in other words, conservation of the natural resource base in conjunction with social justice.

A peaceful world and an efficient global economy will dependent primarily on the economical and efficient use of energy and raw materials. The limits of the cost effective use of many raw materials are drawing nearer and the ability of the earth's ecosystem to absorb pollutants is close to exhaustion.

Humanity's future depends on whether it can implement vigorous countermeasures to prevent the looming ominous developments. The few conditions to which the global community has been able to agree so far are not enough to prevent catastrophe. If we are lucky, they will gain us some time to get the drastic changes we need under way.

The second part of the Great Transformation that is present, requires not only that we curb the global markets but also that we stop the growth imperative. A new order is needed. It must follow the principle of sustainable development, which socially and environmentally embeds the economy. It needs new instruments for shaping economic and political processes and a more equitable distribution of life chances.

### The Alternative Is Sustainability

»Act in such a way that the effects of your actions are compatible with the permanent existence of a human life on earth.« Thus Hans Jonas formulated a new ethical imperative. We can no longer afford to learn this lesson after damage has already been done. That is simply not adequate to address the conditions prevailing in the »unequal, polluted, overpopulated and vulnerable world« (Brundtland report).

Sustainability is a regulatory system, which measures economic choices and social and technological innovations in terms of the global, long-term conditions for a decent life for all people. It establishes an ethos at all levels and in every domain, which can both safeguard living conditions in the industrialised countries and take into account the legitimate desire of developing and emerging economies to catch up.

Only sustainability can ensure justice, peace, human rights and conservation of nature and consider the life interests of future generations. It breaks with the current short-termism and careless consumption of resources.

Sustainability is geared towards the long-term functioning of economic and social processes and respects the limits that arise from the capacities of material cycles. Only sustainability can create a lasting balance between the economy, the social sphere and the environment.



This paradigm of change entails the following: decision-making in politics and the economy will be expanded to include a temporal (long-term) perspective and tied to qualitative considerations (socially and environmentally compatible) in order to manage the earth's limited resources judiciously, but also productively.

Sustainability is at once a practical approach, a substantive guide and a programmatic goal for the modernisation of our model of progress and civilisation. It is a regulatory principle which will only permit what, according to the current state of our knowledge, would be justifiable 40 or 50 years from now.

In light of this we need to rethink and to change our ways of doing things: scientifically, in terms of political governance or consensus-building in society, and also with regard to modes of production and reproduction or management rules.

Speaking figuratively, sustainable development builds a new house for civilisation. Ecology is the foundation, social justice forms the structure. How big the house will be depends on the creative powers and needs of human beings, the options made available by scientific and technological progress and government legislation, rendering the whole thing compatible with the foundation, the structure and the environment.

With globalisation, sustainability acquired far-reaching significance. It represents the *domestic policy of the world*, as proposed at the 1992 Earth Summit on Environment and Development. Its principles are aimed at the global community of shared responsibility without the need for a global regime, which given the resistance of the large industrialised countries is not in sight and, for fundamental democratic reasons might not be desirable.

A binding global agreement is more desirable than sustainable competition. Such an agreement should ensure that common goods, such as the atmosphere, soil fertility, the climate system, biodiversity and so on, which make up our common foundations for life and production, do not become exhausted. Violations of such an agreement should be subject to sensitive penalties. It is conceivable that a suitably adjusted World Trade Organization (WTO) could be mandated with implementation. Parallel to this, appropriate regulations could be incorpo-

rated in the German Constitution and in the European Charter of Fundamental Rights.

A New Edition of the Plan

Just as in the 1930s only the New Deal was able to end stagnation and decline after the end of the world economic crisis, so today a new and ambitious vision of progress is needed. As in the case of the welfare state, sustainability can take various paths and forms: a variety of solutions are possible.

Implementation can start immediately and everywhere. However, establishing and expanding global institutions is lengthy and burdensome. The UN Earth Summit on Environment and Development in 1992 rightly emphasised that the industrialised countries bear the main responsibility for rehabilitating and protecting nature and for preventing global distribution conflicts.

Example:  
Reduction of Environmentally Harmful Gases

The three central environmental elements of sustainability manifest themselves in relation to this challenge:

(a) *Efficiency revolution*. It requires a systematic increase in energy and resource productivity and a reorientation to »immaterial production« (Jacques Delors). Resource waste and environmental pollution can be drastically reduced by means of intelligent deployment of information technology. As a first step, a doubling of economic growth over the next ten years could be accompanied by a fivefold increase in energy and resource productivity (Factor 5). The next stage on the way to an eco-efficient economy would be Factor 10.

(b) *Sufficiency*. Environmentally adapted modes of production and lifestyles are worthy of the name, if over the long term they take account of the finitude and storage capacity of natural resources. New models of prosperity involve an awareness of limits and a protection of natural goods. One important approach is the »ecology of time« which takes account of natural time rhythms in technological and economic decision-making. Sufficiency does not always mean having more but living better.

(c) *Consistency (permanent compatibility)*. Greater environmental compatibility in overall development will be achieved through recycling a circular economy in material and energy use, or through »solar economy«. This consistency would align the economy and society with the laws of nature. Overall accounting in accordance with environmental economics yields an honest notion of growth.

Sustainability is the opposite of the accelerating elimination of spatial and temporal obstacles driven forward by cheap raw materials and low transport costs. Sustainability calls for price formation which includes environmental costs, foreseeable environmental limits and the future viability of society.

Dematerialisation and de-energisation through eco-efficient services offer new opportunities for environmentally-friendly products and future-oriented business sectors, as well as a strong employment impetus. Generally speaking, environmental services are more labour-intensive than current forms of production.

Sustainability links economic dynamism and deployment of technology to the social and cultural needs of the future. Social justice, protection of the natural resource base and enhanced innovation must find a balance.

#### First Step: An Efficiency Revolution

Environmental modernisation must take advantage of the opportunities provided by an efficiency revolution in the use of energy, materials and raw materials. It's about total raw material use. At the same time, a bridge to the solar age must be built quickly. By 2050 we should achieve a complete transition to renewable energies in a »2000-watt society«.

Sparing management of natural resources will be the key issue of the twenty-first century.

The limits of growth also demand more fairness. Conflicts concerning distribution are intensifying because different social strata are affected differently by rising resource costs. In North Rhine-Westphalia, for example, the share of energy costs in the poorest 20 per cent of households is 8.2 per cent, while for the wealthiest 20 per cent the figure is only 2.4 per cent.

Environmental restructuring also involves sharp conflicts of power and interest: nine of the ten largest companies in the world are energy and automobile companies. They defend their position with the argument that restructuring would threaten jobs. The opposite is true.

- Since 1960, labour productivity in western Germany increased by a factor of four. Material productivity, in contrast, has only doubled, while energy productivity has risen only one and a half times. Materials, energy and raw materials account for around 50 per cent of the costs of manufacturing: wage costs, in contrast, account for well under 25 per cent. Increasing energy and resource productivity would therefore make sense both economically and socially.

- Environmental restructuring would reduce unemployment because it can replace energy, materials and raw materials through better technology and work. It would boost companies' competitiveness by reducing their dependence on raw materials. The scope for improvement here is enormous: current energy use involves losses of up to 90 per cent.

- The problems of scarcity and on-going environmental destruction represent an immense market for integrated and systematic solutions in the form of resource- and energy-efficient products and processes. Nikolai Kondratiev teaches us that since the steam engine every economic period has had a characteristic technological infrastructure. In future, efficiency technologies will come to the fore in conjunction with renewable energies. Only economies which establish an environmental infrastructure early on will thrive.

Instead of a conflict between the economy and ecology, as is often alleged, they are internally related. The conditions for this in Germany are favourable: for example, the country accounts for 20 per cent of environmental patents and is a global leader in renewable energies and efficiency technologies; it has also made significant advances in sewage and clean-air technology, plant construction and control engineering for greater eco-efficiency, which every successful economy needs. Demand for those products is growing everywhere.

Every crisis also offers opportunities. The current economic and corporate order, the economy of short-termism, must be radically restructured. These environmen-

tal challenges could be the time for the European Union if it switches rapidly to a social-environmental market economy.

For the sake of environmental modernisation anything which harms the environment must be reduced – for example, high oil consumption and coal-fired power stations – while everything which is compatible with the environment and is socially responsible (such as renewable energies and more efficient technology) must grow rapidly. This is the decisive point of departure for the transformation of growth into sustainable development.

The restructuring process outlined here offers new employment opportunities and prospects of promotion to many workers. However, for many others it means that they will lose their accustomed jobs, will be unemployed for a certain period or will have to re-qualify in order to find new employment in an environmentally-friendly sector of production. This makes the social mitigation of this restructuring process even more important. For Social Democrats it is clear that without an efficient welfare state the transition to sustainability cannot be made.

### 3. Consequences

#### 3.1 Collective Goods Are Becoming More Important

Collective goods are those that cannot be consumed individually. Typical collective goods include air quality, an attractive neighbourhood, the value of parks and recreation areas, etc. In most European countries such goods also include the services of special public facilities, such as crèches, kindergartens, schools and colleges, social institutions, old people's homes, youth centres, hospitals and the police. In a democratic welfare state – that is, in a community oriented towards the equal freedom of all its citizens – services in the abovementioned institutions must be available to all citizens without discrimination.

Apart from the few super rich, for most people their quality of life does not depend on how much individually they can buy and consume. For the vast majority, the key factors in their wellbeing include the quality of their neighbourhood, the accessibility of natural areas, public places, public museums, theatres, schools, colleges and universities, cultural centres, swimming pools and park-

ing facilities in the vicinity. Where these establishments are privatised or the local authorities due to financial difficulties were forced to charge higher and higher fees for access to them, more and more people are excluded from their services and their quality of life falls.

Within the framework of the new progress, in contrast, the provision of collective goods will play a greater role than hitherto. It is crucial to raise public awareness of the fact that collective goods are at least as important for the quality of life of the individual as private consumption. Only when this insight is strengthened among people will they find themselves ready to grant the state and the municipalities' financial resources that are required for this purpose.

The provision of collective goods has a positive distribution effect. Rich and super rich generally live in exclusive residential areas or in closed residential communities with their own security personnel and caretaking services and can afford to send their children to expensive private schools and to take their holidays in the last remaining islands of unspoiled nature. The vast majority, however, are dependent to a considerable extent on the political safeguarding of their quality of life through the collective efforts of citizens, the state and local authority institutions.

Furthermore, public institutions and the collective goods provided by them are the most visible expression of community spirit. Where more and more of them are being privatised, people lose the things they have identified with and concerning which they can make decisions within the framework of the democratic process. In the long term, however, this will lead to a situation in which the most important field where democratic involvement can take place – local democracy – becomes unattractive and degenerates into mere administrative routine. At all levels, from the local community to the national and EU levels, democracy lives or dies with the common projects and institutions of all citizens. Those who push their privatisation are thereby hollowing out democracy.

#### 3.2 Shaping the Residential Environment

In recent years, the financial situation of cities and local authorities in Germany has become more and more precarious: two-thirds consider it to be bad or very bad. The Association of German Cities (*Städtetag*) estimates that

the deficit for 2010 was 15 billion euros, primarily because tax revenues are falling sharply. The reasons for this development are obvious. First of all there is the financial and economic crisis, which has plunged public budgets into debt. Then there is the absurd policy of tax reductions pursued in recent years under pressure from neo-liberal ideology. Finally, under the German federal system local authorities, in contrast to the federal government and the states, are at a systematic disadvantage when it comes to the distribution of public revenues.

The result is that every third municipality with more than 20,000 inhabitants has to have its budget approved from above because they can no longer make ends meet. Investments are diminishing and employees are being laid off. Almost two-thirds of local authorities feel compelled to reduce services even further in the near future. Every third municipality is cutting youth activities or services and institutions for the elderly; and in every third municipality the lights are going out because they are saving money on street lighting.

More than 80 per cent of municipalities are planning higher charges or taxes, especially the property tax. Almost half of them want to increase the entrance charges for swimming pools, theatres and museums; one-third want to raise contributions for day-care centres for children whose parents are in full-time employment (*Kitas*) and all-day schools; they also want to raise parking fees and charges for water, street cleaning and waste collection. A quarter plan further privatisation. If the ruling coalition goes ahead with its plan to abolish business tax, this will deprive local authorities of their most important source of revenue. The alternative would be to increase rather than reduce business tax and to re-introduce a wealth tax. The federal states should also increase their financial support for municipalities.

The financial drying up of city and local authorities is even more deplorable because quality of life today, and in future even more so, depends to a considerable extent on the performance of municipalities. The immediate environment is of the utmost importance for people's wellbeing. Examples include nutrition, accommodation, work, education and relaxation or free time, but also social, cultural and societal needs. For the vast majority of people, their ability to shape their own lives more or less freely, and their personal development depend strongly on local quality of life.

Cities and local authorities are under a legal obligation to ensure »citizen value« or »public welfare« in accordance with the constitutional principle. Constitutional law expert Ernst Forsthoff developed in this context in the 1930s the concept of »municipal services« (*Daseinsvorsorge*). Forsthoff describes local authority provision of public services and utilities as »everything done by the administration to provide the general public or, in accordance with objective criteria, certain groups of people, with useful services«. In short, this concerns the state's obligation to provide basic services, the creation and maintenance of an environment adequate for the co-existence and wellbeing of the citizens. The citizens are able to exert influence over these services via elections, referendums or dialogue with representatives.

When it comes to the sustainable development of local quality of life, however, the occasional influence of citizens and citizens' groups is not enough. Instead, a continuous discussion process is needed in municipalities, districts and cities in which the most important aspects of local development are determined and the implementation of planning is critically monitored. Only if there is a clear revival of local democracy will interest in safeguarding the quality of life assert itself against short-sighted partial interests. This can be done. Because the strength of local and regional democracy is the spatial and social proximity of people to the issues to be decided.

Talking about improving the quality of life only in general terms will hardly encourage people to participate. Much more important is to focus on concrete aspects of quality of life in the everyday lives of the local population. This involves identifying the needs of the local community in dialogue with them and finding out what elements of quality of life could be improved in their area. A viable sustainability strategy can be implemented only with the citizens, not against them. To meet this requirement, however, against the background of a culturally heterogeneous society, political leaders need to promote integration, and to combat anything which obstructs it, such as discrimination against children with immigrant backgrounds in education, wage inequalities between people with the same qualifications and doing the same work, failure to recognise qualifications, xenophobia and so on.

Sustainable quality of life cannot be decreed from above, but must be shaped jointly by citizens, local parliaments, the administration, businesses, associations, societies

and churches in a dynamic civil society. New participatory procedures, such as a local Agenda 21 (LA21), take up these needs but must be supported and, above all, financed by government.

In conclusion, all this implies the following:

- Local authorities must be in a financial position to meet their responsibilities properly. Besides the provision of public services and utilities, local actions/initiatives must be financially funded to enable citizens' participation in improving local quality of life.
- It is an important aspect of the quality of life that everyone must be able to participate. In Bavaria, for example, non-EU citizens do not have the right to vote in local elections. Children are generally excluded from decision-making. More extensive use should be made of the instruments of direct democracy, such as referendums and new participatory opportunities, such as local Agendas 21.
- The integration responsibilities of the municipalities should be taken more seriously if any kind of socially just civil society is to emerge.

3.3 Preventive Welfare State

The conventional approach to social security leads to ever growing financial needs, which are difficult or even impossible to meet without considerable economic growth. If we want to liberate ourselves from the fatal compulsion to pursue growth we have to change social policy strategy from the ground up. The concept of »preventive social policy«, as outlined in the SPD's current policy programme, points in the right direction, even though the consequences arising from the expiration of the old progress model are not yet drawn very clearly.

Preventive social policy should not usurp »remedial« social policy, but rather complement it, paying more attention to the hitherto neglected aspect of prevention. It not only compensates but also seeks to intervene in the processes that generate social problems. There are four dimensions in which the concept of preventive social policy goes beyond the conventional approach:

- It concentrates on combating the *causes* of social problems and shortcomings instead of merely or primarily alleviating their consequences.
- It requires broadening of the notion of conventional social policy to encompass society as a whole.
- It demands a departure from the dominant individualising approach to social problems in favour of individualized consideration of inherently difficult situations and structures.
- It is based on a sophisticated understanding of social security which looks beyond what is merely technically doable and affordable and takes into account the socio-cultural determinants of social security.

The four dimensions of preventive social policy are closely interrelated. Anyone wishing to combat the causes of social problems effectively will have to go beyond the existing departmental boundaries of social policy because many social problems arise from mistakes and omissions in other policy areas. For example, an education policy that leads to a large number of young people failing to obtain the qualifications they will need later in life thereby produces a multitude of social problems. Bad decisions in urban and environmental planning often contribute to the destruction of vital neighbourhoods and promote the formation of ghettos or the isolation of old people, resulting in a whole mess of social problems. It has long been known that the causes of many health problems have their origins in inadequate or inhumane living and working conditions.

Therefore, if in the future we want to prevent financial cost problems in social and health care policy, social policy must be transformed from a social perspective. If we take seriously the connection between living conditions and social problems we will have to detach ourselves from the still widespread individualised understanding of social problems and resolutely address situations and structures that generate problems.

This expanded understanding of social problems also raises awareness of the socio-cultural aspects of social security. A living environment in which communication flows freely; neighbours who take care of one another in an emergency; meeting places in which people can encounter others with whom they can exchange experi-

ences; active associational structures; street parties and cultural events which convey community experiences: all these are factors which can contribute to a feeling of belonging and thus to social security. In this area, too, a preventive social policy should create enabling structures or prevent the destruction of such structures.

Alongside all this, protection against life's contingencies – poverty, sickness and handicap, unemployment and old age – remains a key task of the welfare state. The new progress requires a comprehensive structural transformation, which cannot be managed without the protection afforded by the welfare state. The social policy of the new progress must achieve both: the extension of preventive social policy and the stabilisation of remedial social policy.

### 3.4 Humanisation of the World of Work

Leaving behind the existing growth paradigm also has considerable consequences for labour policy, in particular trade union collective bargaining. It is true that the trade unions must continue to fight for a decent living for all workers. To that end, the struggle for minimum wages, equal pay for men and women, the equality of agency workers in the workplace and so on are important. However, in future the emphasis of trade union collective bargaining should no longer be primarily on a general increase in salaries, but on reducing working time and humanising working conditions, including stronger participation in workplace and company decision-making. The chances of a new collective bargaining and parliamentary offensive in the area of the humanisation of the world of work are a lot better than many people think. It will be even more important that we take advantage of them as we prepare to leave the traditional growth path.

The urgent topicality of the *humanisation* of work becomes clear when one links the question of the future of work with the question of work in the future. With the relentless march of rationalisation and automation, what kinds of work will be left? Presumably over the long term – at least in the market sector – all those jobs will be automated in which the performed tasks can be completely defined and computed. What will remain will be jobs that cannot be automated: management and advisory activities in the economy and administration, marketing and advertising, some craft and agricultural work, artis-

tic production, inventing, planning, development, maintenance, personal services, communications, motivation, organising learning processes, creativity, getting on with people, looking after them, consoling them, caring for them: everything that machines simply cannot do.

All these activities by their very nature are labour intensive and not suitable for rationalisation and automation. This is why today they are considered too costly. In this instance, however, the customary economisation strategies do not lead to more efficiency and ceased long ago to improve quality of life. Such strategies rather diminish or even thwart the services provided. Replacing teachers by computers, replacing nurses by monitors or replacing parish priests by »Thought for the Day« on the radio simply perverts the service in question, instead of making it more effective. Also, personal and other non-rationalisable services are particularly expensive in our social security system precisely because they are labour intensive and impose a much heavier burden on the funding of social services than the highly rationalised sector does.

This means that any attempt to promote the work of the future entails ending the privileges of the machine and harnessing value creation in all the sectors which depend on it to a greater extent than ever before. We need to help to fund those tasks which can be performed only by human beings. Only in this way – as well as by investments in health care, nursing care, education and research – can the large and growing need for personal services be met; only in this way we can help the domestic demand to grow and merely allow the machine-based sectors to sell their products. Self-evidently: it is not machines that buy machine-made products.

Instead of continuing the crude ideas of progress of the nineteenth century, as well as the privileged status of machine-based work, we should seize on the utopian opportunities offered by rationalisation and automation, in particular if they go hand in hand with more efficient use of energy and materials. First of all, this would give us a chance – previously believed to be impossible – of releasing many from difficult work which is largely under the direction of others and of increasing the amount of free time for all, thereby also boosting people's opportunities for democratic participation in all areas of society. For this reason reduction of working time – including intelligent new forms, such as regulations on working on the Sabbath – is once more a trade union and social

issue of the first rank. On the other hand, the type of work which is of vital importance and cannot simply be rationalised away is usually more challenging: it generally opens up greater opportunities for meaningful activity and offers forms of intrinsic satisfaction that far exceed anything generally available in traditional industrial and office work. A genuinely modern service-based society, oriented towards people's needs and not towards capital, could offer satisfying and humane employment opportunities for all, including those who have not obtained the highest degrees in the education system.

It would be a very good thing if the trade unions and the SPD were to further develop what, in the 1970s, was discussed under the heading of the *humanisation of work* and in the 1980s in terms of *employee-oriented time sovereignty*, with reference to the conditions of the post-Fordist and post-industrial working world. This will not be abandoned by those whose sole concern is the recovery and interests of capital. New communications, organisational and production processes are opening today – at least in principle – undreamt-of possibilities to reshape the world of work in accordance with the vital needs of workers, not to mention the particular needs of women. At the same time, an opportunity presents itself to improve the conditions of the various forms of unremunerated work (voluntary work, community work, care work and so on). Needless to say, this can be achieved only if the disproportionate power of capital is broken, for example, by developing workers' codetermination and via legislative initiatives.

### 3.5 The Strategic Lever: Restructuring Energy Supply

Energy supply in the industrialised countries must be almost emissions free by 2050 if climate change is to be limited at least to some degree. Furthermore, only if the industrialised world makes a determined effort to lead the way to new progress, can effective agreements on emissions reductions be reached with emerging and developing countries. Without such radical change, war and destruction will loom. It is not without reason that Gro Harlem Brundtland has compared climate change to a »slow atomic bomb«.

In order to prevent resource wars and secure peace, the increase in fuel and energy efficiency and the transition

to the solar age is crucial. This Herculean task can be performed, however, only if society undergoes far-reaching change. And this must happen quickly because time is running out. Without targeted regulatory limits on energy consumption and a significant increase in the cost of the restructuring, the targets will not be achieved. This in turn requires compensatory measures for the benefit of weaker sections of the population.

Among the indispensable instruments of an environmental financial reform will be genuinely binding emissions trading, with no exceptions and provision of steady dropping ceilings. Of particular importance is a whole bunch of measures for reshaping road and air traffic: speed limits, kerosene taxes, air traffic taxes, motor vehicle taxes based on cubic capacity and use, abolition of preferential rules on company cars, a toll on cars and a reduction of commuter allowances.

Equally important is the reorganisation of urban and settlement structures to reunite separated functions and to consolidate neighbourhoods. Conversely, more favourable conditions must be created for public transport systems and non-motorised mobility.

Food, in all its aspects, must also be reorganised, since in its present form it not only threatens the climate but also endangers global supply of food and fuels financial speculation with it. The greenhouse gas effect of our food system, according to the Worldwatch Institute, stands at over 18 per cent, even higher than the transport sector.

All areas of the economy and of life must be designed so that energy consumption and emissions are minimised. The allegedly »clean« nuclear power is no solution since it produces highly dangerous waste, which has to be stored for thousands of years under the strictest security. Using nuclear power as a bridging technology would merely magnify the unsolved waste disposal problems and delay the necessary change of course in energy policy. In the medium and long term a switch to emissions-free energy supply is possible. This could even prove to be beneficial from an employment-policy standpoint because an increase in energy productivity and innovation in the solar economy could create large numbers of industrial jobs.

### 3.6 Mobility in a Society Based on the New Progress

The transition to *fossil-fuel transportation* was a huge leap in the history of mankind. Speed of travel was increased to a previously unimaginable extent: even the air was opened up to transport, making any point on the earth reachable in a matter of hours. However, the basis for all these astonishing advances was non-renewable fossil energy sources. Today, since peak oil has been attained and the dramatic consequences of climate change are impossible to ignore, this development is coming to an end.

The situation is being exacerbated by the catch-up motorisation in the large emerging economies, such as Brazil, China and India. It is delusional to expect that the need for fossil-fuel energy for rapidly expanding transport systems could be met by means of the exploitation of tar sands – which is extremely problematic from an environmental standpoint – and by the ever more risky deep-sea extraction of oil. A fundamental change in our conception of mobility is inevitable.

The key question is:

How can mobility be ensured for all if the fossil-fuel energy sources which hitherto have been amply and cheaply available are coming to an end and transport emissions must be drastically cut back?

Our aim is to secure in the future a high degree of mobility for all. To that end, a new balance must be struck between near and far, fast and slow, and motorised transport and physical movement. In the future, technological progress in this area will play a significant role. For example, electro-mobility based on renewable primary energy offers not yet explored opportunities. At the same time, however, the transition to a different mobility paradigm must be shaped both culturally and socially, including measures to reduce transport demand and forced mobility.

The principles that guide us are as follows:

a) In future, energy and material efficiency, as well as the avoidance of transport emissions, must be top priorities. For this purpose, the environmental costs of overloaded transport systems and all the hidden and open subsidies

should be eliminated. This also applies to air and marine transport.

b) We wish as far as possible to avoid forced mobility by revitalising neighbourhoods, changing planning policy and settlement structures, integrating workplaces in residential areas and making more use of digital communications.

c) We wish to further improve conditions for pedestrians and cyclists in cities and towns.

d) We shall focus our efforts on expanding public transport systems, especially locally and regionally, including a key role for electro-mobility.

e) In order to shift transport of goods onto the railways we shall have to build up, step by step, a separate network for it.

f) The alleviation of the burden on the passenger network achieved in this way will make it possible to provide better connections and better cycle times.

### 3.7 Sustainable Agriculture

Sustainable agriculture and sustainable agricultural policy have a number of aspects that need to be considered. Based on the saying »earn from nature, don't try to control it« ecologists demand that we treat the natural resources of our immediate surroundings – earth, air and water – in such a way that they are not permanently damaged, for example, due to unnecessary fertilisers and pesticides. Because of this, prevention of water pollution has long been a subject of political and administrative action. Forms of cultivation should serve both to maintain biodiversity and the landscape, which means that large-scale monocultures must not be permitted. Biodynamic cultivation in accordance with ecological expertise puts this into practice by applying techniques which do without chemicals, genetically manipulated materials (agricultural genetic engineering) and agroindustrial technologies. The knowledge and skills of farmers, such as crop rotation, intercropping (cultivation of different plants in one field), terrace cultivation and water cultivation should be used and actively studied.



In this context, ethical considerations come into play, for example, concerning animal welfare or the use of genetically modified materials or seeds. There must be guarantees that in the future farmers will be able to decide freely in favour of gene technology-free production and consumers will be able to obtain food which has not been genetically modified. The political framework must be created for this purpose.

From a socioeconomic standpoint, it is important to secure the livelihoods of farmers who opt for natural and sustainable agricultural production. Multifunctional agriculture must be supported and developed further through the opening up of more sources of income in the tourism sector, cultivation of renewable raw materials and the generation of energy from, among other things, biomass. In this area, too, large-scale production in monocultures is incompatible with a sustainable approach. Further sources of revenue should be developed through governmental rewards for nature conservation and protection of the countryside.

Demand for sustainable agriculture is already increasing among consumers. Indeed, consumers are responsible for supporting a sustainable agricultural policy through how they spend their money. Such a policy will be possible on a broad basis only if the environmental costs of currently cheap intensive livestock and environmentally dubious agriculture are properly apportioned. Today, the agricultural intermediate sector is significant in the food industry and food retail market, and it can in the long term lead to a dominant market position. Government needs to address socio-political nutritional goals and to develop a sustainable food policy.



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