

Social Theory, Ideology Critique and Class Struggle

Constitutional Manifesto of Assoziation Dämmerung

„A world must be overthrown, but every tear that has been shed, although it could be wiped away, is an indictment; and a person who, rushing to their important business, treads on a worm through raw carelessness commits a crime.“ (Rosa Luxemburg)

Our group, Animal Rights-Action-North (Tierrechts-Aktion-Nord, TAN), has changed. Neither our theoretical nor our practical work remain the same. With this change, we have taken a step away from the current animal liberation movement, without breaking with it. The name Animal Rights-Action-North no longer lives up to these political intentions. We will therefore continue our work under the name Assoziation Dämmerung (Association Dawn). For our friends, this is no reason for mourning, for our enemies, none for joy: we remain committed to the goal of the liberation of humans and animals, but our understanding of the conditions of the struggle for this goal have broadened and the members of the group have changed.

25 years for the liberation of humans and animals

A quarter of a century has passed since TAN was founded. The colourful history of the first left wing (autonomist) animal welfare group in Germany, which came to consider itself an animal rights and at the time of writing this manifest as an animal liberation group, began in 1986, with an informal association of animal welfarists and environmentalists – such as members of anti-vivisection initiatives and the Green Party – as well as anarchists who were tired of attempting to change social relations by ‘the long march through the institutions’. What unified these people was not so much a shared political world view or a similar theoretical foundation than the basic impulse of all social upheaval and progress: immense horror and deep sadness at the immeasurable suffering experienced by the most defenseless in a capitalist society organized along social-Darwinist principles, and the determined desire to end this suffering.

On 24th April 1987 these people carried out their first act of civil disobedience under the name of TAN. Activists chained themselves to the entrance of a branch of Lufthansa in Hamburg’s city centre in protest against the transport of “laboratory animals”. From then on, they radicalised their practice and offered resistance to the oppression, exploitation and mass murder of animals. They formed a supporters group for the underground movement Animal Liberation Front (ALF), which in those days still operated in Germany under the name Autonomer Tierschutz (autonomist animal protection, AT). TAN-activists also took part in social struggles, in protests against the discrimination of migrants, against racism, militarism and war.

Since the beginning of a process of degeneration amongst a large part of the German Left, catalysed by the collapse of real existing socialism and the foundation of the Berlin Republic, TAN saw – and continues to see – the necessity for a radical ideology critique of the left’s pathetic remains, especially of those ex-leftists who opportunistically turned into anti-communists and took up central ideologemes of neo-conservatism.

Seeing the theoretical impoverishment of the animal rights and animal liberation movement to be a weak spot, TAN focused its engagement on establishing foundations for a critical theory of the liberation of animals on the

basis of the works of Marx and Engels and the Critical Theory of the Frankfurt School. An important document of this development is the volume *Das steinerne Herz der Unendlichkeit erweichen: Beiträge zu einer kritischen Theorie für die Befreiung der Tiere* (That humans soften the stony heart of infinity: contributions towards a critical theory for the liberation of animals), which contains papers from a conference organised in 2006.

Following Marx, Engels and the Frankfurt School it becomes evident that the relationship of humans towards animals as well as towards internal and external nature is mediated through labour and that these relationships must be recognised as historical in a commodity producing class society. This provides the groundwork to conceive the social struggles regarding humans, work and nature no longer as just somehow and partly merging into one another, but instead to bring them down to their common denominator and identify them as accordingly mediated. Herein lies politically and theoretically the chance to move away from a mere subversive life-style to a practical positioning in the social fabric and from a “scene” to a political movement.

Critical social theory

An analysis and critique of contemporary capitalism and its imperialist ambitions which is in keeping with the times cannot do without a consideration of the destruction of the natural basis of all life it has caused. This is the conclusion we draw from our theoretical work of the past few years. Equally, any protest against such destruction will remain ineffective if it does not contain a thorough criticism of its social causes. Capitalist society can only develop the process of production by simultaneously undermining the source of all wealth: the earth, the animals and the working people.

The unbridled growth of productive forces and the glorification of this development, in which some communists are barely distinguishable from their capitalist class enemies, have increased the domination of nature immeasurably—in the states with real existing socialism no less than in those with real existing capitalism. In view of the catastrophes of Chernobyl and Fukushima, climate change and industrialised murder of animals, blind technology-fetishism, a result of the mechanistic philosophy of history and anthropocentric contempt towards nature, must be rejected.

But even the ecological movement has by no means impeded progression of the global stock corporation for the exploitation of nature. It has only – sadly – served to modernise it. “Green capitalism” is no real alternative to the system of blind domination of nature. At best it can simply shift its destructive force to other areas. There is no alternative to consciously modelled – and thus non-capitalist – social production methods that respect humans and nature in their mutual dependence.

On a theoretical level, this means for us emphasising the revolutionary, and towards social/class struggle directed momentum of historical materialist theory, without which there would never have been a critical theory of society. We contest any attempt to play off the ideas of the Frankfurt School against the revolutionary impulse of Marx and Engels. The advocacy for the damned of this earth does not go against the critical theory of Adorno, Horkheimer and Marcuse. The opposite is true: it is upon just these struggles that this theory must be formulated, communicated and mediated; in these struggles it must demand the experience of solidarity, in which objectified consciousness can be broken down. A “critical theory” which refuses to acknowledge real political intervention and misuses theoretical reflection as an argument against practical class struggle is none after all.

As long as there are social relations that produce oppressed beings it will be necessary and possible to attack these relations through fighting the oppression. Our criticism is directed towards the culture-industrial indoctrination of individuals and their every day social exclusion, be it through neo-liberal education policies or anti-Muslim racism, or through their use as cannon fodder in imperialistic armed conflicts. That our struggles are necessarily particular does not mean that they do not encompass a rigorous critique of society—rather this critique brings with it an imperative for the way in which these struggles must be fought and reflected upon. It is in the involvement with the actual wrongs that historical materialist critique must prove its will to change.

Thus, we reject a “critical theory” which only observes indifferently and uncritically, and dares to even call this “ideology critique”. Critical social theory searches for reasons why the revolution has not happened, not for possibilities of preventing it finally.

Revolutionary Realpolitik

As anti-capitalist left wing we cannot allow our structures to splinter and to finally become organisationally isolated. We only have a chance of stopping the downswing of the left and their social relevance if we are able to provide an appropriate answer to the attacks of those in power.

Such, we can only develop if we do not simply follow rigid principles in questions of organisation and tactics. An automatic aversion to parties and parliamentary politics, though understandable to an extent, is just as stubbornly principled as contemptuous attitudes from subservient party soldiers towards independent and confident non-parliamentary opposition. We do not decide whether a political practice is right or wrong a priori, and independently of political constellations. We will also not prostitute ourselves at the slightest hope of a pragmatic step towards a far off goal that can barely be seen on the horizon.

Single issue politics, as practiced by many autonomist and other non-parliamentary groups, has, despite some impressive results in social struggles, proved to be both theoretically and practically inadequate. Theoretically, because a social relationship of exploitation and domination, such as the one between humans and animals, cannot be analysed and explained simply through itself, but only through a critical theory of society. Practically, because the varied positions that exist in society re-emerge in almost all political movements, leading to the forming of the same factions throughout the political spectrum. In capitalist society, the boundaries run between the classes as well as the marginalised and their oppressors, not between individual priorities in political work or particular activists’ preferences. Crucial is not in which area one builds resistance against the domination of capital, but that one does so here and now.

The allegedly “left wing scene”, animal liberation, anti-fascist and anti-racist or anti-sexist groups do not automatically stand for the struggle for liberated society—sometimes quite the opposite. For that reason, they do not automatically provide a positive point of reference. The animal rights or animal liberation movement has always orientated itself by the undogmatic left. The few cases in which it positioned itself beyond human-animal relations, this happened in form of a distancing from the traditional left, as if there were no graver problem, as if there was not the central problem: capitalism.

The animal rights and animal liberation movement can no longer afford to underestimate this basic problem. If it continues to not break out of the spell of bourgeois ethics and no less bourgeois idealistic pop-left discourses, this will be a historical failure for which we do not want to be jointly responsible any more. It is not enough to condemn speciesism as (morally) wrong thinking. The causes of this murderous ideology must be fought—its economic basis must be removed.

In this spirit, we want to try to influence social discourse in the future by organizing events as well as delivering our own talks and statements, where and to the extent to which our energies allow us to do so. However, we cannot be effective alone. Furthermore, we will therefore connect with other organizations and establish networks and structures. We see potential allies in emancipatory action groups, Marxist organizations, local district initiatives, the animal rights and animal liberation movement, in trade unions, the anti-nuclear movement, anti-imperialist organizations, left wing parties or the peace movement—as long as the tension between the goal of social transformation and concrete politics is maintained in these groups. We support alliances against Nazi-marches, but not with old or neo conservatives, and we are for improvements in parliament, but not with bellicistic comrades of the bosses or the heirs of Ebert, Noske and Schröderi. Anyone unable to handle this tension will end in sectarianism or as an uncritical reformer.

Forwards to a solidarity of life

In this spirit, we will carry on along new roads, remembering from where we started: the horror about the suffering of humans and animals in the un-free society. Suffering is the epitome of experienced negativity that calls for nothing more than that it may stop. It is objectivity that burdens the subject and forces it to build knowledge and finally towards actively changing social relations. We understand the pain and suffering of the oppressed not least to be the motor of dialectical thought, with which we go into action against an ideology that serves two main functions: firstly justifying dominion and legitimising those who exercise it; secondly hiding the suffering they produce. This is why it holds: “That suffering becomes eloquent is the condition of all truth”.

Assoziation Dämmerung carries on the original impulse that has united members of TAN for a quarter of a century on a further developed level. Henceforth, our political activity is supposed to lend weight to an important, by far not new but not yet enough reflected experience that precipitated in our collective consciousness over the last years: the intuitive knowledge of suffering is a blunt sword in a society in which the right of the strongest reigns. Our agenda therefore is more than ever predetermined by the attempt to convey compassion politically into the “solidarity of all life” claimed by Max Horkheimer, with the help of the enlightening science of historical materialism and the establishment of an effective anti-capitalist movement. Such solidarity is the condition and the result of a reconciliation of humanity with its inner and outer nature.

Assoziation Dämmerung

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