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Sustainability from below

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**The New Social Contract:
Sustainability from below**

by

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Introduction:

Some Premises and Assumptions

Realistic concepts of alternative change requires an understanding of the interaction between internal social relations and the international environment.

The transnationalisation of the world economy is presently changing all the rules of the political game! To a large extent an international division of labour at the level of production is replacing the former setup based on the nation-state, thereby releasing new power relations. All along this process has been accompanied by an almost unchallenged praise of free trade and free competition. In reality, however, increasing parts of global capital movements, production, distribution and trade operate outside the sphere of free competition. They are internal transactions of a restricted number of actors, who operate independently of borders and are accountable to no one except their often anonymous shareholders. *An enormous sphere of non-accountability has emerged.* According to the Egyptian economist, Samir Amin, the new forms of control are spearheaded by five radical monopolies (in the spheres of finance, technology, resource-management, the medias, means of mass destruction) who operate as one. One of the effects, according to Amin, is a new historical phase of worldwide social polarisation.¹ Globalisation has conferred to the capitalist class a new bargaining power fundamentally changing the balance of class forces.² Its lever of control is capital movement: the threat or reality of capital flight.

The restructuring power of global accumulation today constitutes a concrete and increasing threat to human survival in various ways and degrees. No corner of the world or level of existence is safe. Another important result is the division of the world into powerful, competing blocs. Many perceive this global power structure as a MEGAMACHINE, in the face of which human beings are reduced to helplessness.

This paper, however, is based on the assumption that it is the present *internal social relations which explain the prevailing political impotence.* In other words: If we could find a framework to change the mode of producing and consuming in the highly industrial societies, it would create better conditions for reforms in the Third World, eventually making it easier to solve international problems as well. **The paper is an attempt to formulate such a framework.** In the present context of globalisation, the absence of an alternative vision or project is crippling and paralysing initiative, diverting popular movements in dangerous directions. To make the framework concrete, its focus is North European, specifically Denmark, "seen from below" and through a woman's ideal-type perspective.

Change involves relations of power.³ Unable to legitimate itself through positive self-images, the ruling discourse tries to persuade people that the present regime is unavoidable and eternal. In other words, change presupposes the establishment of faith in the possibility of shaping a better future. Change, moreover, depends on the ability to form political alliances. For historical reasons earlier examples have usually been alliances formulated by and for men. This has restricted political imagination, suppressing and making invisible the symbolically "female". Deliberately choosing a woman's perspective and seeing society "from below", implies a concern with the human being: with men and women of all ages, and with the contradictions of everyday life. From the point of view of change, the presently ongoing crisis can no longer be understood exclusively in terms of struggle and cooperation between capital and wage labour (itself part of capital). Included in the dialectical relationship is the increasingly acute *contradiction between wage labour and the whole human being*.⁴ In varying degrees, globalisation is giving rise to a life and death struggle between the world system as such and the whole human being, including the natural conditions for human reproduction. By choosing a woman's perspective, power relations become more transparent, and forms of resistance become visible which conventional thinking hardly even registers.

People in the "North" often pretend to know what is best for the rest of the world. The fact is that we don't. It is the argument of this paper that people in the "North" in their efforts to come to terms with their own problems under the conditions of globalisation *may be forced to become part of the solution rather than remaining part of the problem*. Potentially this would create a basis for international solidarity not just as a splendid idea, but as a reality.

In the following I shall look at some of the real life implications of the processes described in the introduction.

The Social Contract Under Attack

As already suggested, we are living through a global crisis. The *environmental crisis* is wellknown. Very briefly the problem could be summed up as follows: The present Scandinavian way of life is based on global inequality. The Danes belong to the privileged 20 % of the world's population that consume about 2/3 or 3/4 of the world's resources and produce about 90% of the industrial waste. This implies that our ways of producing and consuming are neither sustainable nor can they be generalised. This notwithstanding, the international medias, our development experts and the financial advisers insist on making our way an international model to be emulated by the rest of the world. This fact in itself makes our style of life a threat to humanity's means of existence not in a far future, but already today. Moreover, it is now officially recognised that energy and other

crucial non-renewable resources are rapidly being depleted.⁵ We are reaching the objective limits to growth. This imposes political, economic and social reorientations for which our societies are entirely unprepared.

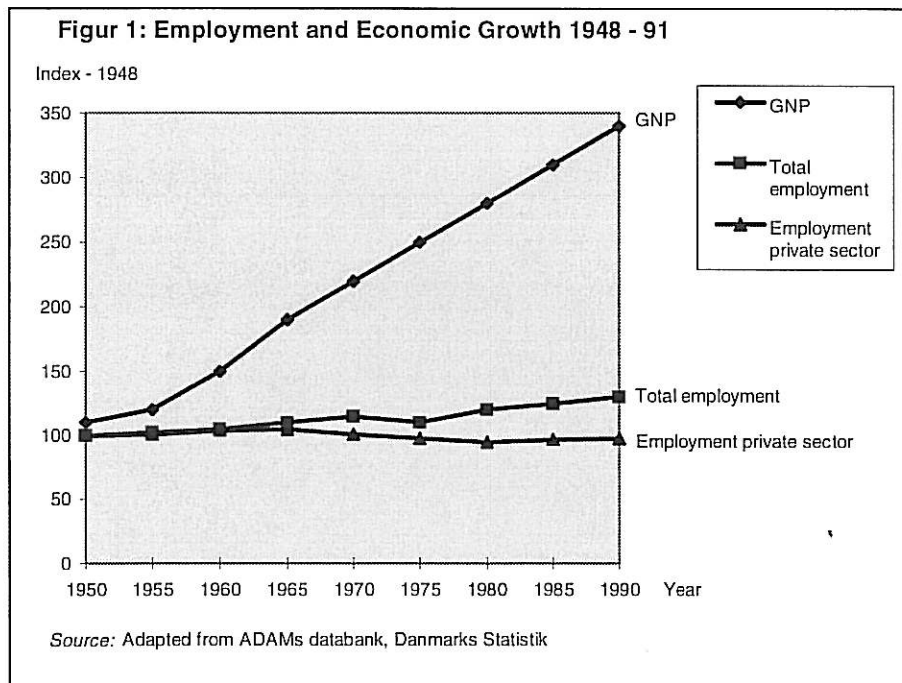
The problems of the environment and the coming scarcity of resources are calling into question a whole historical concept of society in our part of the world. **Problem no. 1:** If human beings are to survive on Earth, this generation of Finns, Germans and Danes will have to change their way of life. On the other hand, private individuals (the electorate) in our societies depend on jobs based on a particular pattern of production and consumption for their livelihood. *This is the political problem we have to solve.* But it is not the only one!

This is combined with an *economic crisis*. Both crises are undermining the basis of the Social Contract which we have known until now. From the point of view of women, the struggle for equality and emancipation has been an integrated part of the existing Social Contract. Now, even in a country like Denmark, where, by international standards, women are among the most formally educated and professionally integrated, the feminist strategy finds itself in an impasse and in need of new perspectives.⁶ The gender aspect is an integrated part of the ongoing crisis.

Women's demand for sexual equality is rooted in recent history. As a political project the struggle for Equal Rights arose in Europe. Equal Rights was the slogan which unified the forces in the overthrow the sacred Rights of feudalism. For the following 200 years Equal Rights became the political battlefield of opposing social forces and the platform of social compromise which ruled our societies. Presently the very concepts of rights and equality are called into question.⁷

Since the Second World War the **Social Contract** has been based on a compromise between the State, the labour movement and private enterprise. The State and the labour movement cooperated to create a business-friendly atmosphere. In return private business was expected to invest and deliver the jobs providing people with means of livelihood. Most men and women believed in this arrangement. They behaved and cooperated. Today this social construction no longer works.

I don't know the specific figures for other countries, but in Denmark recent statistics show that during the entire postwar period, employment was created not by private business, but by the public sector:⁸



(The figure shows that while total economic growth during the postwar period increased by 253%, total employment grew by only 32%, while the net growth in private employment decreased by 1%.)

As we all know, the above mentioned period included the *longest period of uninterrupted economic expansion in the history of capitalism*. Its "Golden Age". Actually, the economy was kept going and relatively full employment created by large-scale expansion of the public sector. This was also the period when women entered the labour market in great numbers. Thousands of new jobs were created in the public sector to provide the services to make this possible. Now, Danish women were no longer economically dependent on their husbands. Instead a new dependence was created: dependence on a patriarchal state both for social services and jobs. The traditional housewife almost disappeared to make room for the commodification of the private sphere and the rise of consumerism.

Today the party is over. Society is facing mass unemployment, and the State is paying the price of former expansion in the form of a fiscal crisis - the problem of financing the public debt. In other words: *the private sector (the Market) cannot increase the number of jobs, and increasingly the state is also incapable of doing so*. There are of course great differences among the individual European welfare states. But this structural problem is almost universal.

All over Europe (East and West) the preconditions of the social contract which operated and created relative harmony since World War II are evaporating. Unemployment is increasing while financial insecurity is reaching unprecedented proportions. We have seen how competitive advantages created by wage restraint over an entire decade may be wiped out in a matter of days by financial speculation.⁹ In Eastern Europe, thousands of young women are "voluntarily" being sterilised to ensure their position in the labor market! In Denmark the labour market participation of women is among the highest in the OECD-countries. The families have come to depend upon this income. High mobility according to job possibilities have broken up the family- and neighbourhood networks. The dependence on child-care, health- and welfare services is complete. Now budgetary constraints are creating problems on all levels of existence.

If the entire foundation of the Social Contract is indeed disappearing, we must ask ourselves: *What will be the unifying idea of the new social contract ?*

Women have struggled for equality. For our mothers this was a practical matter: "You must at least have some skill so that you are economically independent of your husband." Be able to provide for yourself - have a job. Economic independence gave freedom of choice, responsibility, democratic rights. But today this strategy based on labour market integration only works for the elite of highly educated and women in well established employment. The large majority of women (including also many highly educated ones) face growing wage discrimination, increasing difficulties and deterioration of social conditions. For ten years the "feminisation of poverty" in the Third World has been discussed. Now the same phenomenon is being reproduced in Europe.¹⁰

The issue also concerns **democracy**: During the postwar period, market forces penetrated deeply into civil society. People have become entirely dependent on commodity production either in the market or with the state as an intermediary. Mass unemployment combined with our existential need for a livelihood makes us an easy prey to *political blackmail*: To live, we are told, we must be competitive. Compete with East Asia, with Mexico, with low wages in Poland and with American technology. To live, we must not take unilateral initiatives to prevent ecological destruction in connection with our very own way of producing and consuming: We must wait for an international agreement, otherwise others will take our jobs! For the same reasons we are incapable of solving the international debt crisis or relieve the increasing inequality of the international division of labor: Processes that lead to growing polarisation between poverty (destitution and insecurity) for the many and historically unprecedented affluence (based on institutional waste) for the few. In the midst of formal democracy, political legitimacy is eroding.

And still. Even when we accept this destructive pattern, *it doesn't solve anything*. Unemployment keeps increasing and so does the gap between the rich and the poor in our own countries. This creates a climate of social insecurity, a pathological resistance to change while paving the way for new unpleasant trends (racism, break-down of solidarity etc.).

What will be the new platform for political struggles ? The new social compromise capable of uniting people accross the political spectrum around a viable social project ? As we have seen, today neither the market nor the public sector can provide people with the means of making a living. Still we have to live. The logical answer must be to organise ourselves to create the means of survival not only independent of the bread-earner (male or female), but of the labour market and the State as well.

In fact, the **ecological crisis** and the **socio-economic crisis** converge in the sense that *the obstacle to a solution of both is related to people's need for jobs in order to live*.

For women, gaining control of their basic life conditions implies the revival of civil society. For many years women researchers have pointed out that protection of the environment required greater control and responsibility at the level of everyday life. But in order to unfold individual and collective responsibility, people need some liberty of action. We need basic material security to allow us the freedom to dispose. Ultimately, the ability to choose between alternatives is a precondition for being responsible adults. Deprived of the necessary freedom of choice with respect to our means of subsistence, democracy turns into a farce.

The dilemma is exemplified in the report on global environmental problems, "Our Common Future" - the so-called Brundtland-report -which sees economic growth as a precondition for sustainability. The idea being that growth creates employment and that jobs are needed for people to be free and responsible. But what if growth does not create jobs and does not liberate? *Basic material security is the precondition for responsible action and the creation of sustainability.*

This, I believe, is the new political project.

What Are the Practical Implications?

About twenty years ago there was an international debate on a so-called "basic needs strategy" for Third World countries. What I am suggesting is a *Basic Needs strategy for industrial societies*.

As an "ideal-type" model, one might call it *a new form of mixed economy*. We have today the public sector (the State) and the private sector (the Market). We need to add a third sector. One of **subsistence**, *as financially independent as possible of the two others*.



The creation of a sector of subsistence or "necessity" (a survival sector?) means establishing *a new social space based on the logic of civil society*. Its rationality would resemble that of the family or the household, where activities are needs-oriented, independent of market considerations. When I call the model an "ideal type" construction it means that in practical politics some compromise must be made at least initially and that its implementation may vary according to local conditions.

One can imagine different paths to the creation of universally guaranteed basic security independent of the labour market.

Politics from above: Conventional thinking conceives of change as the outcome of politics from above. In the context of the financial crisis reestablishing control of capital movements is, indeed, a precondition for implementing almost any type of socially or ecologically responsible policy from above. This is a minimum political requirement.

Another obvious method of saving and consolidating the welfare state would be the redefinition of the role of the State. Not in the direction of an all comprising, centrally planned economy based on hierarchy and control which very few people want. As we know, such a structure doesn't guarantee social and environmental responsibility, and leaves ordinary people little influence on their basic life conditions. But this doesn't mean that the public sector couldn't undertake selective income generating activities (to cover the deficit and the costs of necessary services). The concept of public infrastructure could be enlarged to include for instance public ownership and control of financial institutions (for economic and social reasons) or the energy sector (for environmental reasons).

Provided sufficient political consensus could be achieved, the forementioned new "necessity sector" (parallel to and coexisting with the market) might be publicly promoted or organised. The Swedish economist Gunnar Adler Karlsson years ago suggested a system, where as an alternative

to income tax, all citizens would contribute a restricted amount of flexibly organised labour in the course of their lifetime to collectively produce the minimum necessary, in exchange receiving a purchasing card giving lifelong access to the minimum goods and services to guarantee basic material security. This "Necessity" sector would coexist with what he calls the sector of "Affluence", i.e. the sphere of free initiative and enterprise.¹¹

Another important (but at the moment hardly realistic) step would be a financial reform abolishing interest on money. For many this would spell instant relief from a situation which is becoming unbearable. (Most home owners, farmers, fishermen, small business, students etc. are in debt.) Interest rates constitute an enormous obstacle to necessary initiatives on almost every level, including the welfare sector. In Denmark, old-age homes, hospitals, all public buildings and institutions pay large amounts every year on debt servicing. Since interest payments are tax-deductible, the financial system contributes to Denmark's fiscal crisis both directly and indirectly. Such a reform would abolish money in the commodity form, while retaining money as means of circulation.¹² However practical and reasonable the suggested reforms would be (and more could be added), they are not (yet?) part of the political agenda.¹³

Moreover, politics aiming at social and environmental sustainability, will hardly succeed unless being combined with a mass movement and a clear vision. Under the conditions of globalization the space for national politics, exclusively from above, is limited. Nevertheless, "for better or for worse", the situation is bound to change...

Politics from below: For women, however, everything grows from below. Deliberately choosing such an approach to political thinking implies a strategy of transformation based on the step by step creation of basic material and social security from below: SOLIDARITY.¹⁴ *On every turn, for every choice of options the measuring rod must be: What would be the consequences for the most exposed groups?* The immediate *objective* of universally guaranteed basic security is *to remove the fear of losing one's job, one's means of livelihood*. Nobody should legitimately fear that any proposed change will be at his or her expense. In an "ideal-type" model on this basis, the sector of subsistence (Necessity sector) should, to the largest possible extent, be self-organised, economically independent and rooted in everyday practice. Its existence would, as a longterm perspective, lead to a shrinking of the State.

The Question of Strategy: How Do We Move From Here to There?

In a less complex society (or in a situation of social collapse and general upheaval) the policy might consist in promoting (from above and from below) the voluntary formation of cooperation and redistribution covering basic needs, independent of, but coexisting with, the market. An organised survival network to guarantee all its participants a lifetime provision of basic necessities. In some societies, a land reform and the collectively organised provision of funds would be required. In Denmark, the relatively selfsufficient household of the 1930s belongs to the past. The majority is entirely dependent on income generating activities or welfare, the availability of which can no longer be taken for granted. Society is complicated, housing and rents are high, most people have private debt. The private car has expropriated the "commons" , i.e. the public space, where civil society should ideally unfold itself. There is a serious problem of social disintegration and atomization. This indicates a different road to universally guaranteed subsistence.

The Movement

Most academics and scholars of social sciences working with theoretical constructions are reluctant to venture into the territory of everyday life.¹⁵ The same applies to some anti-systemic Marxists who fail to see beyond the capital-labour nexus. In their opinion, the present period is characterised by a lack of political movements. In reality, however, in Denmark (and I believe the same is true for several European countries) the social activities to carry out the forementioned project already exist. It may be described as *a movement on three levels*.

I. The Roots ... on which everything else depends

What is here referred to is the everyday practice of individuals, small local groups, basis groups, initiative groups or networks. But mainly mutually independent activities.

The "model" consists in starting where you are: removing the obstacles that can be removed. There is a caring for the environment and for each other: the sorting of waste, environment activism, promotion of health, recycling, mutual aid (socially, psychologically, practically), organising parties in the department building, spring celebration between neighbours on the street, setting up non-profit cafe's or clubs in the specific neighbourhood. There is the common cultivation of gardens (allotments), the exchange of clothes, furniture, services, food, the products of the garden. There is communal living (small and big collectives) the sharing of dwelling place, production collectives. Some do it because they are short of money, others for practical reasons,

and still others simply as a way of being with other people. Some are anti-consumers. There is a strong element of rebellion against the ruling logic (the market forces, wage labour, the tax authorities, social control). Many activities are characterised by a popular, profusive and exuberant cultural life on all levels: songs, music, dancing, performance, decorations, dressing up and making of masks, political dialogues, street theater, clowns, etc.

An enormous informal sector (green, "black" or red) has emerged which constitutes people's way of surviving and establishing control over part of their life conditions. It is a needs-oriented perseverance, relatively independent of exchange value. As little money as possible is involved. Of course there is a considerable amount of moonshining. But that is only part of the phenomenon. Things are exchanged, given away, fished out of garbage containers. The gift principle is widespread. There is an implicit feeling that human relations and things tend to lose their value when you ask to be paid for them. There is a considerable amount of social tolerance: What is taking place is not a matter of "free and equal exchange", but the unfolding of variety and living together.

Out of this confusion, controlled and surveyed by nobody, *a new political culture* emerges. A cooperation for survival and for the unfolding of potentials. The approach is concrete and practical. In the midst of contradictions you are doing your best. Some people constantly loose courage. And constantly new beginnings are made. Not just socially and culturally. Protection of the environment and resource management constitute a growing community of interest. What is at issue is the conquest of areas of independent self-determination: control over the basic life conditions independent of wage labour and the market.¹⁶

II Experimentation and Innovation

I am here referring to (A) the **practical** process of innovation which goes on from the grassroots to the highly specialised level. A movement of experimentation, learning from each other and giving each other new tasks, etc. For example developing ecological farming, forms of co-habitation, cooperative trades and craft, new forms of technology friendly to the environment and appropriate for the user's purpose and purchasing power; experimentation with new forms of recycling, renewable energy, multi-toilets, houses built from mud or recycled waste ... creative cooking based on home grown products, holistic health, artistic creativity and play as new pedagogical forms. Several groups are working on alternative banking systems, which operate practically without interest and invest in environmentally or socially "sound" activities. Some areas have developed their own means of exchange, some experiment with new exchange systems such as LETs.

The other part of the process (B) is **theoretical**. The attempt to solve concrete problems in connection with the organisation of a different society. What does an environmentally sustainable form of transportation, health services, educational system, farming, fishing, housing, etc. look like? How do we, step by step, change the physical, material structure of urbanisation in the direction of sustainability? City-ecology, energy problems, control of poisonous waste, the protection of drinking water ... All of this is accompanied by ethical, scientific, theoretical or philosophical reevaluations.

Busy as beavers this work is being pursued. With scarce attention from research institutions and little public support. It is hardly exaggerated to claim that the solution to many of the most serious problems lies ready on the writing desk if it isn't already practiced in the free space people have managed to create.

III The political level

Here the experience gained from the other two levels should ideally be translated into political action. Instead we see a great deal of confusion and impotence.

Because of lack of alternative thinking the past twenty years have seen the emergence of a multitude of one-issue movements. The green movements, peace-, anti-war-, women's movements, we have the "Revolt from the Center"-movement with its demand for a citizen wage, solidarity with the Third World, with oppressed minorities, anti-racism, the so-called "autonomous" movement, social solidarity, etc, latest the C-Team Rebellion. Nearly all of these operate by means of voluntary contributions and unpaid labour. On top of this, ordinary, upright Danish citizens every year anonymously give away millions of bitterly earned money for humanitarian purposes. They constitute the anti-thesis to the claim of political economy that human beings are born with a mercenary, calculating mind!

These activities are separate, non-coordinated. A closer look, however, reveals a community of attitudes: solidarity with oppressed people or people in need, care for the environment, resistance to tyranny, inhuman structures and behavior, militarism, racism, and positively, the fight for democracy, liberation and solidarity. These currents spring out of a natural ethical consciousness related to what the Danish philosopher, K.E. Løgstrup, calls sovereign life expressions: Instincts and ideals about the relationship between people which lend direction to our actions.¹⁷ Such trends have existed earlier in history, but seldom so quietly and on a comparable scale.

The political problem must be how to create a space for these potentials to unfold and to translate them into real politics. The most logical answer which is being discussed in Denmark, would be

the introduction of a citizen wage.¹⁸ The citizen wage (or guaranteed basic income) conceived not as a goal in itself but as a **method**: a first step to remove social obstacles to sustainability and create a more flexible situation. *Setting free the potentials of civil society.*

The Concept of Citizen Wage:

The basic idea is to provide everybody with a minimum material security *independent of the labour market*. This could be achieved in the form of collectively guaranteeing all citizens free access during their lifetime of certain basic goods and services. It could also be in the form of money. In Denmark by far the simplest way would be for the State to guarantee every person above the age of 18 a fixed amount of, say D.kr. 5.000 a month. The amount should be taxfree and no public or private creditor should be able to distraint upon it. (The insecurity of many Danes is linked to private debt). The c.w. could be supplemented through unemployment insurance so that people who unvoluntarily lose their job (and remain at the disposal of the labour market) receive the same compensation as today. (The citizen wage is conceived as somewhat lower than what is left after tax deduction in the highest unemployment payment. It corresponds approximately to the Danish old age pension).

Financing the Citizen Wage

The State is in financial trouble and the Danish income tax is at a record high: Won't the introduction of universal c.w. be too expensive? The strategy itself implies that it cannot be financed at the expense of the welfare state. It does not substitute special arrangements and care for the handicapped, the elderly, the children or other exposed groups. Rather the opposite is the case. The whole idea behind the citizen wage implies strengthening the social safety-net. Apart from human considerations, the envisaged reorganisation of our societies imposed by environmental imperatives and the growth of unemployment can only be harmoniously achieved if it is based on solidarity.¹⁹

Nevertheless, in a country like Denmark - and this goes for other countries with large state budgets - the c.w. need not impose an additional financial burden as long as we keep in mind its strategic purpose. The citizen wage should not be understood as an extra income everybody receives every month. A kind of general wage increase: This would cause inflation, apart from being absurd. The c.w. does not propose to make the rich even wealthier. The purpose is to make everybody more socially secure and free.

For those employed in the public sector, the citizen wage could be that part of the wage which is retained, whether you have a job or not. It would be identical with the taxfree bottom income. To cover the difference (from the point of view of the State) caused by the higher level of tax deduction, the wage itself could be lowered proportionally, following the rule that *the personal net income after tax should remain unchanged*. For the majority this would make the difference between the c.w. and the full wage rather small and the temptation to take time off to live on a c.w. correspondingly greater. Assuming that the lower wages in the public sector spill over to the private sector, business would suddenly be able to employ people at a lower expense, since they are now receiving a "subsidy" in the form of a guaranteed basic income. As the company owner also gets a citizen wage, this would be a bit too much of a good thing! Keeping in mind that the intention is not to make well-to-do people even richer, the State would have to cover the difference by means of some particular tax or employer contribution.²⁰ Of the 5.1 million Danes now only about 3-400.000 persons need to be accounted for: Namely, those engaged in the free enterprise sector, farmers, businessmen etc. Here, the citizen wage might replace some of the present proliferation of state subsidies or tax privileges which are very unequally distributed among private entrepreneurs. In Denmark private enterprise receives a large number of direct and indirect State support so that in many branches the ability to fill out questionnaires and write applications is more decisive for financial success than production itself. The new system would imply that *the money follows the person rather than things*, production etc.²¹ Such a reform would have to be implemented as a gradual process based on negotiations and adaptation to specific sectoral needs. Once established, such a system would be much more democratic, it would create new life conditions for activities in less populated areas, local activities etc. It would simplify private bureaucracy for the individual as well as public administration. The introduction of the citizen wage in itself saves a lot of administrative expense. Being universal, it requires no control. Once established, it can be distributed by means of a computer and the postal office!

The Citizen Wage is only the First Step:

The citizen wage, thus conceived, initially has to be paid for through a redistribution of public expenditures. At present the latter are financed by the tax system. This situation is far from ideal. What happens, for instance, if the citizen wage succeeds? If a lot of people use the opportunity to engage in an independent life-style, if thousands of citizen initiatives and civil society flourish independently of the market: Who will then pay the taxes to finance the c.w. and the welfare state? The crisis in state finances might in itself undermine the citizen wage from within in the form of privatisations, deregulation, public savings, higher prices for public transportation, medicine etc. *All this means that the citizen wage has to be seen not as an objective in and of itself but as a method, a strategy.* Through citizens' initiative the citizen wage (defined as universally guaranteed

basic security) should, as early as possible, become self-reliant and gradually self-financed as well. Not in the absolute sense, of course, but understood as an ever present priority lending direction to our practice. With a guaranteed basic income, people would to an increasing extent be free to create their own mutual aid networks, mutual subsistence networks so that basic material security could gradually take the form of real goods and services collectively produced and distributed. The idea is not historically new. In the 1930s Danish unemployed workers established a number of successful cooperative enterprises. Today, such initiatives could be supported by interest-free loans either from new, alternative banks, or from the existing pension- and other employed peoples' funds. (Of course, contributions should be voluntary up to the individual's free decision) In other words: For practical reasons, the citizen wage will in the first instance have to be an unconditional universal right, financed by the tax system. As a gradual process, however, minimum basic security could be redefined as the reward everybody receives in exchange for socially useful labour. A **universal right** to basic material security which the citizens mutually guarantee each other through the **universal obligation** to take part in flexibly organised production, the extent and content of which are democratically decided by the participants themselves. (In its "mature" form, such a "sector of necessity" would probably function as a combination of centralised and decentralised organisation operating independent of but coexisting with the market).

The implications are many

The citizen wage implies a change in the concept of the WELFARE STATE. From patriarchal, patronising welfare based on tutelage and social control to a WELFARE SOCIETY as a **liberating project**. Universally guaranteed material security independent of the labour market as the precondition for freedom and responsibility.

In this new form of mixed economy (State, Market, Necessity sector) the role of the market would change. It has been said that the market is an excellent servant but a terrifying master! By abolishing the **coersive** part of wage labour, the market would function as everybody's excellent servant - not as the master of society. It would also change attitudes to consumption. People would now have a real choice between the amount of efforts in terms of wage labour they want to invest, in relation to the material standard of living they desire. **The concept of labour** would change. Some would start thinking that letting out a room or giving up the car could make the difference between fulltime labour and a freer, more flexible style of life.

In Denmark, the majority of people would probably still want a job. Not only because wage labour has become part of people's identity (this would change) and because modern living is expensive. Modern adults have become socialised to expect others to organise their time and feel

correspondingly insecure at the perspective of almost unlimited disposable time - especially under the present conditions where the private sphere has become depopulated and devoid of meaning. The c.w. conceived in the above manner does not in itself create more jobs. There would be more job-rotation, more part-time or flexible employment, more moving in and out of the labour market according to needs in the different stages of life. Experience in Denmark indicates that the universal possibility to take leave of absence (full time or part time) would create a turnover on the labour market that would render terms such as "unemployment" or "exclusion" obsolete. Also the material basis for inequality between the sexes would be removed implying possibly a fundamental change in the relationship between children and adults, men and women.

After the introduction of the citizen wage...

Well. First of all many would probably start spontaneous activities to guarantee its purchasing power: an explosion in recycling activities: clothes, furniture, spectacles, tools, bicycles etc. and an expanded exchange of services, the sharing of living space ²², transportation.

The present social contract makes it virtually impossible for people on the dole or on welfare to engage in free activities which might threaten the job of somebody else. **Now the role of organised labour would change.** With a citizen wage, the atmosphere on the labour market would become more relaxed, competition for jobs less acute, and the relationship between the buyer and seller of labour power more equal. This implies a potential for organised labour to play a more active and positive role in the reorientation of production inside and outside the formal sector. The c.w. creates the preconditions to overcome economism within the labour movement.

Moreover, the perspective that people would be able to move in and out of the labour market according to their needs opens the possibility for people to engage in really meaningful activities together with others on a life time basis. Lots of people are presently frustrated because too little is done to solve the many problems of our society. Some would start organising nationwide preventive health campaigns, some would start reorganising public transportation in such a manner that private cars will become less indispensable. Right away some people will organise work-teams to establish a list of priorities to save the environment. Voluntary groups would carry them out. (One of the initial obstacles to ecological farming is the present price of labour power). Also within the sphere of care and nursing (children, sick people, elderly) one might foresee a reorganisation to improve the services and make them more humane. Empirical evidence from existing movements seems to indicate that many people are so eager to start solving our most urgent environmental and social problems that they would be willing to work without extra pay if they and their loved ones were guaranteed life time basic material security.

.....

I have elaborated the idea of a citizen wage as a first step to facilitate essential changes, because one of the obstacles to political activism has been the lack of perception of how to move from "here" to "there". The concept is simple, easy to implement and an ideal platform for broad political alliances across the political spectrum: Opponents so far are a minority of people in power and those addicted to the control of their fellowmen (this includes a certain version of socialism). Actually, the citizen wage combines the liberal dream and the socialist vision!

This does not imply that one might not conceive of other ways and means to **universally guaranteed basic material security**, which must be considered a **precondition for sustainability**. Inspired by the Swedish economist Gunnar Adler Karlsson, I have described a new type of "mixed economy" where the market and the state are supplemented by a "necessity sector" preferably independent of the two others. Such a structure might be created from above through state intervention, or, as illustrated, through collective initiatives from below: Best, in a combination of both. The presently existing world order makes the movement from below the more realistic. In this connection, the question of power is of course essential. For the time being, however, power is first of all relative and relational. Experience from the debates in Denmark implies that raising these issues in itself creates a catalyst for political awareness. At the moment, Casino capitalism has taken the nation state as a hostage, limiting its room for political manoeuvre. This means that successful implementation would realistically require cooperation between the peoples of several countries f.inst. the Nordic countries. Or even better, the simultaneous introduction in the whole of Europe (East and West). Working in such a direction would undoubtedly enrich the concept enlarging its sources of social experience. As we know, a general articulation of a new policy vision is not really useful unless it suggests a framework which can guide political interventions. Such a framework will in all events be influenced by forthcoming changes brought about by the crisis. In the coming period we may have to experience various degrees of environmental collapse combined with social disintegration, perhaps conflict. It is essential to start preparing for the transition to a different form of social organisation. The process is fraught with dangers, which may at any time create entirely new situations. Under such circumstances, what is not feasible today may be feasible tomorrow...

Anyhow, this is the way I see the platform of struggles in Europe in the coming years. The need for a new social contract where the former struggle for equal rights in the formal sense is transcended and redefined in a liberating vision based on universally guaranteed subsistence. A

"basic needs strategy" from below for industrial countries is a precondition for achieving the difficult transition to a sustainable society.

No longer an institutional part of the problem, we could join hands in solidarity with other people and start changing the world.

Notes:

1. Samir Amin: *The Future of Global Polarization*, 17 pp. 1994. Working paper from Aalborg University.
2. Robert J.S. Ross and Kent C. Trachte: *Global Capitalism - The New Leviathan*, State University of New York 1990 p. 25.
3. Power, according to C. Wright Mills, is the ability to realize one's will although others resist. (*The Power Elite*, 1956 p.9) Power, however, is not only the visible interaction between actors, but also the ability of some actors to prevent certain issues from becoming part of the political agenda, or even arising. An example is the crisis of the welfare state, where neither the role of the financial sector nor the possibility for the State to engage in income generating activities enter into the discussion. According to Gramsci's idea of ideological hegemony, if capitalist ideas are sufficiently dominant in a given political culture, even challenging forces will formulate their interests within the confines of concepts that assume the continuity and natural right of current arrangements. (Ross & Trachte, *op.cit.* p.9) Thus, challenging the dominant discourse may be the first step to change the relations of power!
From women's perspective power in terms of control and domination is the same as tyranny and considered counterproductive even in the context of resistance. Power, moreover, is seldom absolute. It is relative and relational. For women power is used in the sense of "empower", i.e. mutual enhancement of power by means of solidarity.
4. Cfr. Michael A. Lebowitz: *Beyond Capital. Marx's Political Economy of the Working Class*, London 1992.
5. Cfr. White Paper from the European Commission: "Competitiveness, Growth and Employment", Bruxelles December 1993.
6. The labour movement is facing similar challenges.
7. Equal Rights was a slogan of the bourgeois revolution. It rests on the assertion that "all men are created equal." (In the original statement, women were excluded). Leaving cases of abnormality aside, it could be argued that all people are equal in the sense that they are born with a digestive system and the need for food. But certainly, not everybody is born with access to means of subsistence!
An important basis of sexual oppression has been men's institutionalised monopoly on the means of subsistence. In the bourgeois family women were made dependent on a male "provider" and master. This turned the sexual division of labour into a caricature. In their struggle for emancipation, Danish women have fought for part-time jobs for both men and women: unsuccessfully. The following strategy of fulltime integration into the male dominated labour market and the struggle for equal pay had a high price and wage inequalities persist. Full time jobs for parents with small children is a price few are happy to pay, and not what women were dreaming about. The concepts of emancipation and equality need to be transcended. In his critique of bourgeois rights Marx pointed out, that since people are different not only in nature but endowed with different talents and obligations, rights in order to be fair, would have to be unequal! (*Critique of the Gotha Programme*)
8. Cfr. *Ugebrevet Mandag Morgen* No. 42, November 30, 1992.
9. For an account of the role of the financial sector in the collapse in the Swedish welfare state, see Joachim Israel: *Klappjakt på välfärden*, Ordfront, Stockholm 1993.

10. During the past 100 years, labour productivity has increased within most branches of the economy. This made possible higher wages and increased consumption. But not all branches have raised their productivity. To play a symphony requires as many musicians and time as it did when the first symphony was composed. Still we cannot for that reason pay musicians much less than others. What the American economist William Baumol calls the "**Symphony Syndrome**" implies that in the highly productive modern society musicians become relatively more and more expensive.
- The same goes for many types of caring and work with people. In Denmark the public sector has taken over the most important areas which because of the "syndrom" are no longer profitable on the market. Thus, it takes approximately just as much time and labour to wash an elderly invalid today as it did at the time of Florence Nightingale. As much time, to feed, wash and change a baby. Teaching, doing research, etc. Because of the "syndrom" the price of these activities increases relative to others. This is an important element in the crisis of the welfare state.
- Moreover, privatisations and rationalisation in hospitals, nursing homes, teaching institutions etc. implies the introduction of a rationality which is inherently foreign to the activities themselves. The result is what Ivan Illich calls "counterproductivity", i.e. the real costs turn out to exceed the expected benefits. But often the costs are invisible, they become "shadowwork" (Illich) translated into individual suffering or the invisible, unpaid surplus labour in the private sphere. Since women not only traditionally but today are primarily engaged in activities which cannot be rationalised in the same manner as the production of shoes and sausages, discrimination is inherent.
11. Gunnar Adler Karlsson: *Nej til fuld beskæftigelse - Ja til materiel grundtryghed* (Erling Olsens forlag, København 1977). Originally written at the request of the Swedish Institute of Future Research, it draws for inspiration on historical Dutch and German "models". In the 1970s the Danish Social Democratic party organised study groups on it. Adler Karlsson's argumentation has inspired important aspects of my own work. It also inspired Andre Gorz. (See Appendix)
12. Earlier this century, the economist Silvio Gesell in his work: *Die natürliche Wirtschaftsordnung - durch Freiland und Freigeld* (1919) developed such a system. His ideas influenced Keynes and other later economists. A simple description of the system is found in Magrit Kennedy: *Inflation- and Interestfree Money*. The Danish magazine, *Salt* No.3 May 1995 has a translation of Silvio Gesell's main argument. - In recent years thousands of experts from the financial sector have lost their job. It would be highly appropriate for some of them to form a group to study the possibility of implementing a better financial system than the one we have today. Reforming the national financial system could be a first step towards an overhaul of international finance.
13. Denmark is part of the European Union. At present most member countries have chosen to cut social security and health services in their effort to curb budget deficits and meet the criteria of the European Monetary Union (EMU). The result is social polarisation and conflict. (Cfr. *The European* Nov. 16-22, 1995) Nationalisation and social control of the entire European financial sector could make the EMU less socially costly and easier to implement. But this would be counter to the Union's political agenda.
14. The concept of solidarity needs elaboration. The word is derived from Latin "in solidum": joint responsibility. Its everyday meaning implies "making common cause with". In the labour movement the concept is political implying a mutual relationship between people with the same interests. It is symmetrical: "Today I am in trouble. If you don't help me now, what do you expect will happen tomorrow, when you are in need of support?" "Together we are strong."
- Defining solidarity as a universal, abstract political concept based on community of interest and symmetrical relationships makes it negotiable, subject to rational, utilitarian considerations. This turns the concept into a caricature, a disguise for particular interests opposed to real solidarity.
- For women solidarity is by definition assymetrical: It is a sovereign life expression deeply rooted in human beings: An existential imperative. To leave helpless people, sick or exposed individuals or groups to their destiny without care or efforts to help is contrary to the idea of what it means to be a human being. Assymetrical relations are basic to human survival: the children would not survive without it. It is non-negotiable! In my text I use the word in the latter meaning.
15. An important exception is the Nordic Network of women researchers: *The New Everyday Life - ways and means* (Nord: 1991:19).

16. This asserts the fact that real "economics" cannot be understood exclusively in terms of market-economic rationality. After all the transition to industrial capitalism implied the violent expropriation of peoples means of (material, social and cultural) reproduction. As Karl Polanyi has shown, market-based exchange is only one of three historical forms of economic transaction. The other two: "reciprocity" and "redistribution" always played a major role. Of the three, market exchange was historically marginal. What made the transition to the market society possible was the violent commodification of land, labour and money. (Polanyi: *The Great Transformation* (1944), Boston: Beacon Press, 1957).
Actually, still today, within the family or close social relations, the concept of "free and equal exchange" hardly operates. Here the stronger members contribute according to ability and the children receive according to needs. Otherwise the human species would hardly have survived.
17. K.E. Løgstrup: *Den etiske Fordring*, Copenhagen 1956.
18. The Danish debate on citizen wage was launched in the 1970's by the movement "Revolt from the Center". It caught the imagination of many. At that time the concept was insufficiently defined and the fathers of the movement saw full employment as a precondition for its practical implementation. Later the Greens took it over as part of their programme. From December 1992 and the whole of 1993 the debate spread to most Danish newspapers and political parties. Among the rank and file the interest is keen across the entire political spectrum. The political establishment is rather hesitant or directly opposed to the idea. Several political parties have established committees to study the c.w. idea, and a few of them are officially in favour of it. The youth movement of several liberal and christian parties favor the c.w.
19. Denmark introduced so-called "green" taxes in contempt of social considerations. As a result the enterprises and the rich continue their wasteful practices, while people on welfare or the elderly have to apply for additional support whenever the weather gets cold. The principle of solidarity would have implied low fee for fixed installations and minimum consumption (of water, electricity, heating) and high taxes on excess consumption: Punish wastefulness and reward responsibility. As everybody pays according to meters, this would have involved no practical problem. As it is, "green" taxes has become yet another disguise for balancing the state budget by undermining social security.
20. The latter type of tax already exists and is widespread in the rest of Europe. This means that it could easily be adapted to the new situation. Again the guiding idea should be that nobody must financially profit by the c.w. The c.w. would save the employer 2.500 in wages, while the State would be 1.250 D.kr short in tax revenue. The employer contribution would have to make up for the 1.250 D.kr after tax.
21. In European agricultural policy this way of thinking has lately been advanced as a method of preserving rural communities at a time of crisis. It is in various forms implemented in the new agricultural policy to prevent the sector's inherent tendency to overproduce.
22. Close to half the adult population in Denmark live alone! Many have excess space. At the same time there is a shortage in apartments or houses. Indirectly the c.w. might serve to relieve the housing question. Ultimately, a financial reform is unavoidable.

Outline of a Utopian Society Based on Guaranteed Basic Material Security

by Gunnar Adler-Karlsson

In the utopian society, here described, we find four large sectors: two economic ones, one political sector and one for all the rest. We could call them the Sector of Necessity, the Sector of Affluence, the Power Sector and the Freedom Sector....

The Necessity Sector should be public. It takes care of people's basic material needs. Its size is determined by the sum of those needs which the State has to cover, as well as by the amount of labour required at any given technical stage to produce the essential material goods. This necessary amount of labour should be equally distributed as the citizen's right and duty. In return, the citizen receives a purchasing card, which can neither be sold nor pawned, and which guarantees the individual basic material security on a lifetime basis.

For those individuals who desire a higher economic standard than the one implied by basic security, the Sector of Affluence exists. Here individuals should be able to freely buy and sell, invest and produce, save or waste to the extent that nobody else is harmed by the activity. In this sector all sorts of enterprise-forms could exist, except the public one. The State should essentially stay outside of this sector which should be regulated through general laws. Within the Affluence Sector, private, cooperative, worker-owned, etc. enterprises should be able to compete freely.

For those who are not primarily interested in making money to achieve a higher living standard, than the one provided by the basic needs' sector, there would be the third sector - the Freedom Sector for culture, sports, cohabitation or whatever else human beings like to spend their life on. In this sector a need for extra income may arise because it may be costly to realise some of the dreams people have. Such money can be earned through temporary employment in the Sector of Affluence. But, provided it does no harm to others, the Freedom Sector should try to grant people the utmost degree of freedom from material anxiety in order to realise whatever dreams their imagination may conceive.

The fourth sector, the Power Sector, should look approximately as it does today. Through open and free elections the people should appoint the representatives who ultimately will have to decide those conflicts and contradictions which naturally arise in any social system. Besides, there would probably be a need for a special constitution, drawing the borderline between the three other sectors in such a manner that they remain stable and prevent that f.inst. the Sector of Affluence expands at the expense of the Sector of Necessity and the Freedom Sector.

The Power Sector, moreover, should be the owner of the means of production in the Necessity Sector. But to maintain the balance of power, the people in political power should only under exceptional circumstances have leading positions in the public enterprises.

Through this combination the individuals would be guaranteed not only a good, albeit modest economic standard, but considerably more freedom than they have at present to live a manysided and harmonious life in a less onesidedly materialistic society.

(translated by E.B. from: Gunnar Adler-Karlsson: Nej til fuld beskæftigelse - Ja til materiel grundtryghed, Copenhagen 1977 pp.66-68)

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