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The "Four-in-One Perspective": A Manifesto for a More Just Life

Frigga Haug

Translated by Miriam Boyer

[The March 2008 issue of *Socialism and Democracy* included an article by Ingar Solty that analyzed Germany's new national left party, DIE LINKE, founded in 2007. The following article by Frigga Haug is a brief introduction to her "Four-in-One Project," published as her latest book and widely discussed in Germany during the past year. Various aspects of the "Four in One" perspective have been recently discussed in two conferences of the women of DIE LINKE (November 2007 and October 2008) and in conferences organized by left women in more than 20 cities, as well as in the steering committee of the party, in order to potentially incorporate their demands into the program of DIE LINKE, a party which, although formally describing itself as feminist, has been dominated by men. Frigga Haug is a leading Marxist-feminist theorist. In addition to being co-editor of the German social science and philosophy journal, *Das Argument*, and the *Historical-Critical Dictionary of Marxism*, she is well known for developing a collective research method called Memory Work (on which some of her writing has been published in English), which draws on lived experiences as new sources for theory and knowledge. Other long-time axes of her research include female socialization; labor and automation; and contributions to the field of Critical Psychology. Her recent books (in German) include "Relations of Learning," "Rosa Luxemburg and the Art of Politics," and "The Politics Surrounding the Headscarf Debate." - *Miriam Boyer*]

Without a vision – however uncertain – as to what a new society could look like, it is difficult to engage large numbers politically. Some orientation toward such a vision was developed during the last 150 years through workers' movements that sought to overcome alienated wage-labor and fight in the here and now for higher wages, collective bargaining rights, and jobs. Adding another dimension to this view of liberation, women's movements of the 20th century insisted that not all labor takes the form of wage-labor. They stressed that the sphere of the home was both a site of unfreedom and one of the human provision of care – and that recognizing house- and family-work is fundamental for a kind of politics which takes the liberation of all human beings as its goal.

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Karl Marx expressed even more explicitly a point which is perhaps insufficiently articulated in either of these movements: that the development of each individual is a precondition for the development of all. Translated into our pedestrian language, what is meant is that a goal of liberation must be to allow the capacities that lie dormant in each of us to unfold. In all of these visions – those of workers' movements, women's movements, and individual development – there is a requirement which is so fundamental that it even seems superfluous to state it: The liberation of humans can only be taken up by themselves; it cannot be bestowed on them, it cannot be an act from above. "When we do not free ourselves, it remains without consequence for us," wrote Peter Weiss (1975: 226). Politics for a different society must mean politics from below.

Life is more than labor

At the present stage in the development of productive forces, more and more people cannot access employment or no longer earn wages. Discouraged and disheartened by rising unemployment, they continue to see the only hope for change as consisting in demands for wages and workplace security of those who are still "laboring." It is against this employment-centered focus that I searched for a utopia that does not dismiss this kind of political demand but at the same time incorporates the hope of many others and strives toward a humanly dignified goal. The art of politics, as I learned from Rosa Luxemburg, is not about an a priori definition of the "right" goals and their implementation; the art of politics is about building connections among fragmented struggles, about creating a space of orientation which can re-contextualize the struggles and move them forward.

I am outraged by the promise of governments to create more work – as if there was not already enough necessary work to be done. The problem is not one of magically coaxing new work out of a hat, but rather of distributing the work that we have in a just manner. This does not mean merely allocating workplaces equally to all capable of working. It means instead that all of us can conceive of distributing all human activity – including not only employment but also reproduction, our personal development, and politics – in a balanced manner among each of these spheres.

Since, taking these four spheres into account, we have more than enough work, we can take as our point of departure a workday entailing 16 hours, including what is now non-wage labor. In this workday, each of the four dimensions of life, in an ideal-type calculation, is

allotted four hours. This obviously is not conceived of mechanically, something to be carried out with a stopwatch. Rather it should serve as a compass to steer each of our steps.

In the first sphere, that of wage-labor, it is immediately clear that to speak of a crisis because we're running out of jobs, reflects a highly restrictive concept of labor and clings to it – no matter what the cost. Yet from the perspective of a more integral concept of life, the situation looks radically different. A new guiding principle in labor politics would mean a necessary shortening of every person's labor time to one-fourth of one's working time, that is, to four hours, in order that we may have time for a meaningful life that is balanced among all four spheres. Thus, the problem of unemployment, including precarious and part-time employment, would disappear since we would then have fewer people than jobs. Under this approach, we all are engaged in part-time wage-employment and the term itself ceases to be meaningful. We can concentrate on the quality of work and on the question of whether each is provided for adequately in the deployment of his or her capabilities. Thus, it will no longer be necessary to carry out labor limited to repetitive movements as in Charlie Chaplin's *Modern Times* or its modern counterpart in front of the computer screen. This leads us toward a concept of labor which joins the greatest possible diversification with the development of all human faculties.

Emancipation for everyone

Reproductive labor, the second of the four spheres, does not refer only to labor around house and family. It brings together all that is necessary for the continuous regeneration of civil society. It encompasses work on each of ourselves and on others – widening the concept of reproductive labor to refer to an activity in which the process of becoming human is the goal, not the means, of reproductive labor. This concept of the human as the ability to develop ourselves and others as social beings, led Marx in his 1844 *Manuscripts* to note, following Charles Fourier, that “the degree of women's emancipation is the natural measure of general emancipation” since it is “here, in the relation of women to men, of the weak to the strong, that the victory of human nature over brutality most clearly appears” (1958a: 208). When the weaker, too, may develop in the same measure as those who are stronger, that which is truly human may surface, including love. According to Marx, it is “in the relation of man to woman” that is decided “to what extent the needs of humans . . . have become a

human need, the extent to which he, in his individual existence, is at the same time a social being [*Gemeinwesen*]” (1958b: 535).

This applies likewise to the elderly, the handicapped, and the ill, and also includes the way in which we relate to nature. In Grimm’s fairy tale the relationship of ecology and help among humans is shown with foresight. An old woman kneels on the ground and sews together the torn-up earth. When the youngest son of the king inquires about her activity, she in turn asks about his. This is how she can help him in his search for the fountain of life for his dying father. In order to reconceptualize and redistribute reproductive and family labor, what is needed first and foremost is for it to be generalized. Just as no one should be left out of employed labor, the same applies to reproductive labor. All humans, men and women, can and should develop the full range of their social capabilities. This resolves the contention surrounding payment for child-rearing, as it has taken place in Germany, for example. Thus, defending paid child-rearing should not mean locking mothers into the household or devaluing the quality of the labor that is carried out in this area. On the contrary, only now, in its generalization, rather than its being assigned only to women and mothers, is it possible to achieve our demand that reproductive work be recognized as requiring skills that need to be taught, just as in any other line of work.

A third sphere has to do with life-long development through learning. This means living life not just as a consumer, but enjoying life actively and reflecting on what a good life is. Put differently: we should no longer accept that some speak many languages, dance, make music, compose, paint and travel, realizing themselves as fully as Goethe did, while others are expected to be happy if they can read and write at all. All humans possess a development potential which comes to life out of the slumber of that which is possible. To activate all human senses should no longer be a luxury only accessible to the rich. Rather, each human being should be able to live according to her or his capabilities. In order to accomplish this, self-determined space and time is needed.

The fourth dimension of life, that in which humans are political beings, rests on the following precept: constructing a society does not mean specialization on the basis of labor. No longer need some do politics while others – by far the majority – must carry the burden of their consequences.

A new time-regime

The four dimensions of human life can be woven together into an alternative model: it is an outline for a more comprehensive definition

of justice which can be formulated by women today. It takes as its point of departure the division of labor and the time dedicated to each type of laboring activity. In other words, it seeks to alter our societies' time-regime in a fundamental way.

One could decide to work on each of the four areas of labor individually: wage, reproductive, political, and individual development. However, this would result in a division of labor in which certain groups would take up one of the four areas in isolation as their individual hallmark, an absurd one-sidedness which would again emphasize only one area of human activity at the cost of the societal development of the others. Thus some, led by their class consciousness, would take up labor politics which would be effective for those employed. Yet others would search for a perspective of the past, a backwards utopia for mothers freely choosing to spend their lives at home, nailing us women to the cross of history alive, as the philosopher Ernst Bloch put it. A third group would work towards the development of an elite, which would show, with Olympic talent, what human capabilities can be like. A fourth group would take participatory politics to insignificant areas: they would make television a model institution for the wishes of viewers; they would incorporate the employees into the preparation of Christmas festivities or seek the participation of the population in recycling activities. The point is that in all of these cases we would see that each area, taken as the sole focal point of politics, can become downright reactionary.

The art of politics lies in the weaving together of all four areas. No one area should be pursued without the others, since what is sought is a political constitution of life which, when carried out, would be enjoyed as truly vital, meaningful, engaging, joyful. This is not an immediate goal; it cannot be implemented here and now. But it can serve as a compass for our demands, as the basis of our critique, as hope, as a concrete utopia which incorporates all human beings and in which, finally, the development of each and every one may become the precondition for the development of all.

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