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Why anti-national?

When we declare our opposition to capital and nation, quite a few people would agree with the later part if we appended an '-ism'. Being a 'nationalist' is not a badge of honour these days, instead it is reserved for the types of the British National Party. A proper, democratic citizen does not consider himself a nationalist, instead the much more noble label 'patriot' is preferred. A patriot, so the popular idea, does not look down on other nations, but 'instead' and 'only' loves his own. This love expresses itself in many different ways:

- Cheering for the English, Welsh, Scottish or British team in whatever sport is on telly goes without question. That 'we' win if they win is for some reason understood.¹
- "British jobs for British workers" – Gordon Brown shared appreciation for this with some of the Lindsey wildcat strikers. The disagreement a liberal would register with this is that these sentiments harm 'our' economy.
- 'We' are all in this financial crisis together and need to pull in our belt. In the interest of 'our' economy we will have to take a hit. Although, some of those 'greedy bankers' might have to give up some of their bonuses as well in times of crisis for the sake of 'us' all.
- 'Our' troops deserve 'our' support in Afghanistan, one might disagree with the government but this does not alienate oneself from the troops who risk their lives in order to serve 'us'.
- Some go even as far as asking how many immigrants 'our' culture and country can take.

While these statements deal with quite different topics, they all have two features in common. First, they are based on some common

definition of who 'we' are, i.e. who belongs to this group and who does not: "Nation denotes a people who are believed to or deemed to share common customs, origins, and history" (Wikipedia). Some people also mention language. Second, these statements also imply some content that follows from this group membership (an entitlement for preferred treatment for instance, or a collective worth sacrificing for). The justifications of the groups in question and the demands made in the name of these groups is what we call nationalism.



In the first part of this article we will consider the various reasons being put forward to justify the nation. Some of them are clearly unfashionable these days and thus it might seem somewhat tedious and unnecessary to engage on this level with them. However, these justifications are not as obsolete as one might hope and furthermore have an implicit existence in citizenship law.

In the second part of this article we will explain why and how people are subordinated under the modern nation. We will also give reasons why

the ideology of the national collective is so successful – and why in fact all the above mentioned examples of 'patriotism' are an expression of the same partisanship for one's nation. Even if we accept the common separation between patriotism and nationalism, we note that the love towards one's 'own' nation is the prerequisite for nationalists to look down on others. It is their positive judgement about 'their' nation which allows them to pass a negative on others. While not every 'patriot' must make the transition, appreciation for one nation is the requirement for the nationalist disapproval of others. In any case, we critique nationalism for its love towards a country. Thus, the proposed division between patriotism and nationalism plays no role for our critique.

Before we get on to the particular justifications put forward for nations and nationalism in general we note that need to justify or explain a particular collective or group by something else only appears if the common interest in that group is not a sufficient or self-evident bond. Who would worry as much about the common ground of some skittles club's members (compared to members competing with each other in a modern nation-state)? For the skittles club the common ground is so plain – to skittle – that nobody would bother looking to justify it or in fact give reasons for why this club has really strong bonds and should therefore be a group of common interests.

1 Foundation Myths of the Nation

Common Blood

The claim that human beings can be split into various races and peoples based on their biology and in particular their blood is rather out of fashion these days (except for most fascists) and can quite easily be proven wrong. The most

¹The inversion of the argument, namely that those who cheer for a particular team must be partisans of the corresponding nation is not necessarily valid.

common biological differences of blood types are the rhesus factor (of which someone can be positive or negative) and a blood group. In all parts of the world, there are people with A, AB, B and O as blood group and there is no nation which has members of one blood group only.² There are biological variations with a specific geographic distribution. In some cases a certain illness might only exist in a certain area or in some area far more people have a biological specificity compared to the global average. However, there is no correspondence to the way the world is split up in nation-states; biological features do not respect the boundary between various nation-states. For the moment, we will not concern ourselves with the question why people are ready to take this classification as a founding cause for national unity. Here the point is to simply show that biology cannot be the logical reason for citizens of one nation to belong to it.

Common Language

Language is something all states³ refer to: it is a matter of law and all state have one official language – or several. Switzerland for example makes the point by its mere existence that a language cannot be so utterly decisive for a nation: The country has four official languages. This does not seem to be a reason for a widespread call for its division into four separate units or to join neighbouring countries on a linguistic basis. On the other hand, the British do not have an exclusive usage of the English language as their mother tongue. One nation = one language is obviously not the criterion the world is divided by and language cannot be the *reason* for the existence of each nation.

Nevertheless language is a common instrument for movements of national liberation to legitimise their cause. During the 90s, it was quite common in Yugoslavia to stress that the Serbo-Croatian language was in fact not a language at all – Bosnian, Croatian, Serbian (and Montenegrin) were, so the claim goes, all languages of their own. After some hard work first results showed: words were invented in e.g. Croatian, which Serbs did not understand and the other way around. The formalisation of those differences did indeed split up what was spoken and written in different parts of the country.⁴ The other way around vice versa: when the German state was founded in 1871 2% spoke German roughly in the way it is used today. Linguistic unity was established by means of decree and force and well accepted by the population of most modern states.

Alleged and established differences or not, the language argument ignores the fact that there

are more often than not no clear-cut boundaries between languages: many neighbouring tongues are similar and influence one another. There is no objective criterion for what makes a dialect a dialect of some language or a language of its own.⁵

But even if language were proper means to divide the world into nations: language is a skill which can be learned. It is merely the outer form of a thought. The content of any text can be written, spoken or thought in any language. The language in which the idea is expressed does not presuppose any content or even feelings. It therefore cannot be a *reason* for national differences and thus a proof for why and how nations are nations.

Common Culture

The same argument applies to the criterion of 'customs' as well. Sure enough, quite a few English know how to enjoy a cup of tea – but obviously not all do so (rumour has it some even hate it) whereas some people from abroad do love it. All fondness of behaviour, skill, smell etc. is a matter of taste. To give oneself up to the taste of tea simply presupposes two things: that the person knows about the drink and that she is interested in it or wants to find out whether she likes the experience on her tongue. But her decision to get involved in that particular activity is a matter of will. The result of one's decision is not predetermined by one's nationality, so the nationality cannot be the reason for neither cultural highlights nor cultural horrors.

This argument may seem quite formal. After all, no-one (the BNP and folks alike aside) has asserted that all members of a nation share *all* of the qualities. It would merely be a tendency: people in the UK on average or by numbers speak English, drink beer, are polite and critical of the war in Iraq. More globally speaking: surely there are certain regions where the sitar is played regularly, whereas is it completely unknown elsewhere. However, the claim that this statistical difference would be a *reason* and foundation for a nation is still wrong. For any example in the field of language, culture, custom etc. there will be members of one nation who will have more in common with members of other nations. And one member of a nation that has culturally *nothing* at all in common with another member of that same nation, at least not on the basis of the discussed definition. The only objective difference is the higher likelihood that someone from a particular region is exposed to a particular custom, dish etc. while people from far away might be ignorant towards it – a situation which can be redeemed easily on a personal level, e.g. by reading a

book. Finally, even if there was a particular region with a particular custom not practised anywhere else – that still is no reason for a nation-state. The adherents could simply found a club, team or whatever suits them best.

The spreading of culture is not as innocent as it might seem. The state 'supports' its citizens making cultural choices. What national culture means is communicated in education from kindergarten to university. Through diverse programmes and schemes from the ministry of cultural affairs, the government decides which exhibitions, which artists, which cultural stream to boost. National culture is something co-produced by the state and a result of its actions.

The nationalist appreciation of culture includes the stressing of the 'real Englishman' Shakespeare or 'our' J. K. Rowling – just as if every British person who appreciates the writer would be best friends with her and therefore happy for her books to be received so well. But the idea is a different one: through 'our' J. K. Rowling 'our' national culture is ostensibly expressed. Indeed any cultural work refers to other cultural products and that includes pieces of art from the same national origin. It is a reflection on the existing. However, by baring the traces of and processing present and past art, each piece of art is something new exactly by making that reference. To put it differently, it is exactly the lack of identity which distinguishes a cultural product, its uniqueness, not its identity with some national culture. The much praised cultural treasures are treasures because they are not like the rest. Furthermore, while the references made by cultural products will not be a tribute to all kinds of work everywhere, art never did stop at national borders nor is it a national product. Simply by the artists' citizenship art is declared as English, French or something else – owing to people perceiving it as such. But there is nothing about the piece itself that would make it belong to a nation.

Common History

Common history seems to be a rather objective founding principle at first. It is something that happened and that required (usually) many people to take part. No one can write history on his own. Common history, i.e. history shared by a nation is, what happened to the people belonging to that group in the past. The UK for example was founded in 1707, was a world power in the 19th century and a little longer, and helped to win WWII. In more modern days, its government took a strong stance against the organised worker's movement in the 80s, the UK public lively discussed the need for British troops in

²Even biologists and anthropologists (the latter's job being to categorise 'peoples') have realised by now that race is no objective category. See for example: <http://www.aaanet.org/stmts/racepp.htm> It seems even for them the early days when scientists and pseudo-scientists tried to prove naturally existing human races by measuring peoples' head sizes are over.

³The state is the material basis of a nation as a generally accepted power unit. Therefore, the material state needs to be analysed before the nation and its affirmation can be explained (cf. the section "Foundation of the nation").

⁴By mistaking this political development as something given and natural, some anti-imperialists racked their brains about the justification: if indeed Serbo-Croatian was one language, the separation of Croatia would be unjustified – but if these were different languages, one should support the separation along the language border.

⁵Some Linguists have recognised this fact. A saying by Max Weinreich stresses the state's power over the definition of what is the common language and what is a dialect: "A language is a dialect with an army and navy".

Iraq as well as the size of a healthy model and worries about its teenage pregnancy rate.

So far, so bizarre. Again, the question is, if all that really *founds* the nation. Talking about these facts in Britain's long-ago as well as its more recent history, exactly the unity of the people which is ought to be substantiated is already presupposed. National history *before* the nation-state was formed as a backward projection: Once and only if the 'we' is defined, a group of people long or very long dead can be made into a collective. A collective bound by history to the current one. Anyway, for any occurrence, say, more than a hundred years ago there simply cannot be a *physical* 'we', since no one is left who actually took part. But even for anything more up-to-date, most endeavours and decisions are still taken with at least a considerable minority of people opposing the project; yet, they are still citizens. The other way around makes it fit: If the nation already exists with all its citizens, than there is a collective and a history that can be referred to as 'ours'.

If this history is given as a (or even *the*) *reason* for the nation, then that turns the real relation of nation and history upside down: without the nation there would simply be none of its history – the history is the result of its formation.

Again it is the state which fosters this quid pro quo by educating its junior and senior subjects about 'their' history in history classes, museums and on public TV channels.

NB: Some remarks on the making of the British

Let us have a closer look on how the British were made. Where shall we start? Stonehenge and King Arthur? The Celtic tribes in Britain did not refer to themselves as Britons and did not think of each other as fellows; King Arthur is a myth. Maybe the Battle of Hastings? A massacre, because two ruling elites had a conflict about land and about who was allowed to exploit the peasants – what a nice point to start. How about the Founding of the Church of England? A King who wanted a male heir and took the chance to get supremacy on the church (and the wealth of the clergy) plus a Queen who used the protestant belief to stabilise her reign, that's for sure a reason to cherish a nation! Might Cromwell and the First Revolution be something to start with? Of course, especially the invasion of Ireland and the colonial, quasi-racist regime. A landmark in English and Irish history for sure. Shall we continue with the union between England and Scotland, where the Scottish nobility was bribed by the English crown – if you cannot beat them, buy them! It was of course not done to unite all 'British brethren', but so England could get rid of a competitor

and a permanent threat on the British Isle and to allow the Scottish bourgeoisie to get their deal when Britain started to conquer its Empire. One could continue certainly, but it would only lead to one conclusion: Britain, as every other nation, is a product of bitter fights, massacres, wars, class struggles, economic interests, monarchical strategies and even mere coincidences.

When the process of nation building started, no one thought of a nation-state, but it was its result – with all the consequences. Kings and Queens might have had in mind prestige, holding court and loyal subjects, priests upheld the Virgin Queen versus Virgin Mary, aristocrats and merchants cared about wealth. It ended up in a state that had one goal: national success. Convinced of a special white protestant mission, scared of their French, Spanish, Dutch, Portuguese, Swedish, and other competitors, interested in loyal subjects and soldiers, the ruling elites of Britain did all they could to spread 'Britishness'. For over 200 years, Britishness meant Englishness because of the economic, political and cultural dominance of English gentry and bourgeoisie. It was taught in schools, preached in Anglican and dissenter's churches, portrayed in art and literature, transported even by advertisements for Olde English products and so on. The invention of a national heritage was not a conspiracy but based on conviction.

But one has to forget and forgive if one really wants to love one's country. That is what national history is about – to encourage everybody to see the history through national glasses: Think of Britain as it is portrayed in the upper class kitsch of English countryside in summer. Do not think of all the people who died in the making of Britain. Or if you do, then do not see it as the bloody suffering, the hunger, the terror, the cynical use of human lives by politicians, capitalists, kings, nobles, generals – see it as 'a heroic sacrifice for all of us'. And do not dare to ask who is 'us'.

Some people now might say: right you are, Britain is made up. England, Scotland, Wales, Ulster and/or Ireland – that is the real thing! With the decline of the Empire new nationalism began to succeed in Britain, partly invented, partly revived – and today discussions about identity, devolution and a possible break-up of Britain catch public attention. But this is no way out of hell, rather it is a prolongation and intensification: One can show that what is true for British history is also true for the details of the history of the 'four⁶ nations on the British Isles'. It does not make sense to wonder about national identities and mourn about hidden and suppressed national history. It would be better to have a closer look at what the politics of nation-states is about. The answer to that does not lay in history.

Civic Patriotism

Some answer the question of what holds that nation-state together by referring to an assumed *decision* by all the people belonging to that nation. This understanding suggests an agreement by all with the values and heart of the political organisation of that nation – be it the human rights in principal, be it the constitution or the Magna Carta. In short, it is the idea of Rousseau's social contract founding the nation. It might be true that indeed most citizens agree with most of the principles that govern the societies they live in – but have they ever truly been asked? Or can anyone enter a modern state simply by signing the Bill of Rights after being given it by a friendly border patrol officer at the airport? Obviously not.⁷ It is more or less taken for granted (and actively fostered) in a democracy that people share a belief in the political system, but it is nothing decided by them.

Commonality and affirmation

But even if our refutations would all be wrong and any of the above mentioned characteristics or others were the source for and of a nation, it would only found the existence of the national context on some self-evident basis of affiliation. It would prove, that the people in one nation are culturally, historically or by language somehow bound to one another. But it would still fail to explain why people should refer positively to the nation. Even if one's mother tongue is English, even if grand-pa fought in WWII for the allied forces and one likes tea. Nothing of this implies any partisanship in matters which do not affect tea, discussions in the English language and camp fire war stories. These features do not explain partisanship.

⁶Four or five (add Northern Ireland) or six (add Cornwall) – we could not care less.

⁷It is indeed expected for everyone to stick to a country's rules. A stronger demand might be put on people applying for citizenship. More and more modern states including the UK test their potential new subjects on their knowledge about British history, language and laws. *Who* may even take this test is decided by the government. The civic patriotism criterion plays a role only negatively: one cannot base one's decision on which country to join on its legal or political ideas – the main quality of an immigrant still is to be useful in some way for the chosen state. If one is considered useful though, sticking to, knowing about and being tested on these rules becomes the next obligation.

2 Foundation of the Nation

So far, this article has merely provided deconstruction of the myth that nations exist because of common bonds of their subjects. But this deconstruction can only be the beginning: the usual justifications for nationhood are not an explanation of the nation. However, nation-states do exist, they are far from illusions.⁸ Nation-states' fundamental act is their assertion of their *monopoly on violence*. Nobody but the state itself may use force to break someone's will. That calls for people under the state's rule and a territory where its power is unchallenged: the nation-state asserts itself as the supreme power in society and makes the people living on its territory its subjects.

By declaring and exercising that power over its subjects, it creates some similarity among them: each one of its subjects is subordinated under its rule.⁹ The nation is a forced community and it is based on violence: at each border people risk their very lives and many die when trying to get in (or out – depending on its attractiveness to people). No one born in one state is ever asked, whether they actually like it or not – they are granted citizenship.¹⁰ Thus, the popular “we” is objectively based on an act of power by the state. Consequently, the usage of the word “we” as a shorthand for being subject to the same monopoly of violence would not be ideological. The British state does create the British. But this is hardly ever what is understood when people talk about “us”. They take it as something natural, as a quality of the people who happen to live on the area that once has been subordinated and united by the nation-state. The talk about ‘us’ expresses identification, a positive attitude towards the nation:

3 Nationalism

With all its power over its subjects there is one thing the state cannot do: it cannot create consciousness in general. In particular, it cannot make people nationalists: it cannot create the fitting consciousness. It can punish people for saying certain things, but it cannot control what they think. This, they have to do themselves. Yet, almost everyone does have a positive attitude towards ‘his’ nation.¹¹ Almost everyone

does consider it as a desirable collective. This ubiquity of nationalism leads back to the way people work and consume in this society.

Mutual dependency

Everybody needs stuff: food, clothing, beer, Macbook Airs, the collected works of Calvin & Hobbes Since most of those products are quite complicated to get together, people are dependent on each other through division of labour. In any form of division of labour the producers are materially dependent on each other. However, division of labour in *this* society is something quite different from a rational, sane division of labour of producers working according to a common plan.

Liberty from each other – private property

In this society *commodities* are produced for the market and sold in order to earn money. A steel manufacturer does not first and foremost care about the steel that is produced in her factory nor what nice goods can be made out of steel but the profit she can make. Similarly, the workers in her factory do not have to give a damn about the final product, they work to earn a wage. The organisation of this process is done without direct coercion. Even the most dependent participants – the working class – are not made to work using brute-force but their material condition are enough to spark an interest in working for someone else's wealth. Their interest in their wage is convincing enough, because they materially depend on it. Economic subjects pursue their own *private* interests, a right granted to them by the state.

The capitalist state grants its subjects liberty from each other. That is, no citizen may break the will of another citizen (except when explicitly sanctioned by the state). Alice's will is the barrier for Bob's will: he cannot use force to make Alice do stuff she does not want to do. This applies in general, but it also applies with respect to objects in particular: *private property*. The capitalist state insists that, for instance, Alice may dispose over her chair factory exclusively: Bob has no say, because it is her property; thus her will applies *exclusively*.

While Bob is dependent on the products (such as chairs) produced by other citizens, Alice can be completely ignorant towards the needs and wants of others simply because the chair factory belongs to her. For all this it does not even matter whether Alice or anybody is actually using the factory. One can own a piece of land in Northern Scotland without ever leaving Cardiff; this is how fundamental this exclusion is. Vice versa the other way around. Alice is dependent on products by others who were granted their right to ignorance by the highest power in society, the state. The only way they can come to an agreement on the basis of private property is to offer their own property in exchange; to exploit some other party's interest in what they have to offer. This implies collisions of interests: one is dependent on others and is thus required to exploit their dependence on oneself. They will try to do the same.

The fact that people busy themselves against each other in this way is something the state has an interest in. It exploits the self-propelled interest for its own might: to use the strength of its national economy against other states, to use taxes to finance its own apparatus. The state establishes, fosters and relies on an economy which requires its participants to pursue their own interests out of their own free will.¹² This economy relies on the materialism of its subjects. The state does not command its citizens what to produce and how. It merely sets the conditions and everyone is free to use these conditions to his own advantage.

Law

The state controls the relationship of its subjects among themselves and towards itself in the form of law. The capitalist state ensures that if people have a conflict, and they will, they execute this conflict according to its general and universal rules; usually expressed as rights. In exchange, it offers all counterparts the guarantee that their demands are valid and have as much reach as its law allows. The offer of the state under the rule of law is: if you restrict yourself (i.e. obey the law), you can make use of the highest power when pursuing your legally approved interests. Quite practically this means that the state arrests thieves, enforces contracts and evicts squatters. Or, if

⁸The pamphlet “Against Nationalism” by the Anarchist Federation (<http://libcom.org/library/against-nationalism>) contains many sound arguments on nationalism, imperialism and left wing responses. However, like many other on the (far) left the Anarchist Federation considers the nation merely as an illusion: “The nation is a smokescreen, a fantasy which hides the struggle between classes which exists within and across them. Though there are no real nations, there are real classes with their own interests, and these classes must be differentiated. Consequently, there is no single ‘people’ within the ‘nation’, and there is no shared ‘national interest’ which unifies them.” Their critique of nationalism is thus based on the opposition that they “do not see a world of nations in struggle, but of classes in struggle.” On the contrary, in this text we aim to demonstrate how a “world of nations in struggle” has to be explained on the basis of “classes in struggle”; how the interest in wage labour suggests an interest in the nation.

⁹The definition of who is a subject and who is a foreigner is documented in citizenship law. Around the globe the laws concerning that matter know two principles: *jus soli* (right of soil) and *jus sanguinis* (right of blood). According to the former being born on the soil of a state grants right to citizenship. According to the later citizenship is determined by having an ancestor who was or is a citizen. Some states (such as Germany) almost only exercise the “right of blood” while most states have a mixture of both principles. We know of no state which does not have the *jus sanguinis* in one way or another, e.g. a state where the children of citizens are not claimed as citizens. This is the fundamental enforcement that biological heritage corresponds with nationality. Vice versa the other way around: the claim of some part of humanity as citizens of a certain nation-state also defines the opposite. It excludes everybody else on the same grounds, the lack of correct ancestors denies entry. Every citizenship law is a very practical racism. Most modern states allow for some procedures to gain citizenship later in life. However, these schemes depend on the adopting state's calculation whether those people will be usable or not. Citizen or not – anyone on the territory of a state has to obey to the law.

¹⁰In a world existing of nation states only, it is not a very feasible choice to simply get rid of that member-club-card by throwing one's passport away in order to be free of any rule – there is no territory under no rule. All resources and land is owned – by private or legal subjects or states – so there is hardly any possibility to build up another form of organising mutual reproduction, i.e. live together untroubled by any possible domination.

¹¹Which does not mean that people would not anything through. Most people would criticise a lot: this government decision, that judgement in court, or a certain police action. However the point here is that the nation as such is usually not questioned at all.

¹²When the state is threatened, for example in times of war, this economy can be suspended in favour of direct command.

for example a worker does not come to work breaching her employment contract, a capitalist can take action against the worker – with the help of a civil court. Vice versa the worker can sue her boss in order to get her redundancy pay if it is illegally withheld. No matter what particular situation people are in – as long as they can claim the law on their side, the state will make it his case or provide the legal means to pursue one's goal.¹³

Chances and opportunities

The state ensures with force that peoples' materialism stays within the limits set by private property and other regulations. It ensures that property is without alternative. Thousands of coppers and judges watch over the subjects to ensure that they are law abiding. Since this way the subjects are first of all excluded from the immense collection of commodities and are without alternative, they have no choice but to make use of the miserable means – law – as a means.¹⁴ As workers, owners of corner shops and investment bankers they *need* their rights because any business is done in mutual dependency and enmity of interests. The precondition for them to pursue their interests is the state. All of them are character-masks in the capitalist economy. As such they have an interest in the guarantee of the existing politico-economic order so they can pursue their interests. The state thus is the expression and the guarantor of the *general public interest*.

This practical necessity of dealing with the conditions set by the state, the necessity of pursuing one's own interest under hostile conditions, and the offer made by the state suggest a certain way of looking at the world: the granted liberties are not *just* restrictions (e.g. when granted to others which they can use against one's own interest), but *also* offer opportunities (e.g. when applied to oneself). This interested standpoint considers the state from the point of view what it is for *me* instead of what it *is*.

The erroneous conclusion people draw from this misery is to translate their own restrictions into a set of chances and opportunities, such that even being made redundant is sometimes seen as a new opportunity in this best of all possible worlds. Thereby citizens do not only accept the offer they cannot refuse by the state, but are also willing to mistake the guarantee of rights for a chance rather than a restriction. The state first deprives one from the means of reproduction and then offers ways of gaining access

to those means. Misinterpreting these offers as chances is like a prisoner appreciating the opportunity of prison labour as a way to pass the time behind walls without considering the bars as a fundamental restriction. While this misapprehension is suggested and encouraged by the state and its agents, it cannot effect acceptance on its own, this needs a conscious subject: she either believes it or she does not.¹⁵

It turns out state coercion is not needed: many people do believe it. They criticise the economy as too brute and compliment the state for neutralising its effects to some extent through social welfare programmes by providing education, roads and environmental protection plans. The state is seen as the tamer who domesticates the lion – the lion being either the economy as such or simply (a part of) every human being which needs to be controlled by someone, i.e. the state.¹⁶

Virtuous materialism

This materialism – which mistakes hostile conditions as chances and opportunities – is quite a particular one. The state expects from its subjects that they ask themselves if they are *permitted* that which they *want*. As materialists of the decent kind they want the restriction of everybody's materialism in the interest of their own materialism;¹⁷ they exercise a virtuous or decent materialism. They do not demand the means of living but a fair wage.

This virtuous materialism has two aspects which contain the kernel of the nationalist ideology. First, whoever follows this line, accepts the restriction of private interests in the general public interest; this person wants everybody's means to be restricted according to the general and universal rule. The nationalist call for sacrifices for the nation contains the same train of thought. Second, it comprises the idea that if one does exercise decency, behave virtuous and restrict one's own interests according to the principles of private property and such, then one shall get what one *deserves*.¹⁸ In virtuous materialism the initial materialism still appears. For example, the nationalist demand "British jobs for British workers" presupposes the submission on the one hand but calls for meeting virtuous interests on the other.

Standpoint of the general public interest

Even the sum of interests that are followed in a virtuous manner do not form the general public interest. Neither is the general public interest accomplished by itself. It requires people who have it at heart either as professionals (such as politicians and many journalists) or as amateurs. They remind the rest of the citizenry of the fact that a restriction as a prerequisite for the pursuit of private interests is still a restriction. They take the perspective of what hardships have to be imposed in the interest of the nation.¹⁹ Quite often in this perspective private interests mainly appear as a negative, as what needs to be restricted – ostensibly to their own benefit.

Nationalism

In summary: nationalism is the misunderstanding of taking nationhood as something prior to the nation-state, which inverts the actual relationship.²⁰ Nationalism is the loyalty towards the state as such and that objectively implies one's own subordination under the nation-state and thereby under goals that do no good to people. Nationalism has nothing to offer most of the time but "blood, toil, tears and sweat" (Roosevelt/Churchill). People do of course not follow the logic of this slogan because they want to suffer. Somewhere underneath the nationalism there is the hope that the well-being of the country does mean the well-being of its citizens.

Disappointment

Yet that the restrictions for everyone are actually useful for oneself is refuted by reality for most people almost every day: they are poor, live under miserable conditions and potentially work long hours if they were so 'lucky' to find a job. Reality presents material to correct the mistake that the legitimacy of an interest implies support for its realisation. The legitimate job hunt does not imply guarantee of employment. If someone's rights were violated and the state does exercise its power, even then it does not necessarily imply that the damage is repaired. If someone's bicycle is stolen the police might search for the thief but they will not give a new bicycle to the victim of the theft. Instead of realising the origins of the damage –

¹³There are indeed differences in what the government or sometimes a particular judge or Crown Prosecutor finds worth dealing with. But those are deflections from the rule, visible as such. Even where some legal rights are systematically not enforced the ideal prevails that they should (see below).

¹⁴Strictly speaking, law is no means to satisfy one's needs and desires since it first of all excludes one from the means of fulfilment and then provides a means to overcome its own limitation (such as private property). It does not contribute to consumption in any way.

¹⁵Any theory which claims to *derive* what people think from their material reality contradicts itself. The very thought, which obviously deviates from the derived consciousness, could not be thought if it was true.

¹⁶The picture though does not reflect reality correctly. The tiger can happily live without a tamer – in contrast, capitalism needs the state: from guaranteeing contracts to educating workers (so they are in shape to be used as a resource) capitalism would not work without state power.

¹⁷For example, in a version like "Sure it would be nice if I could simply take anything I need from the shop without paying – but if everybody did it, society would very soon stop to function."

¹⁸What people ostensibly deserve is subject of constant political debate: Economic liberals think people deserve whatever they can get on the market, whereas a little bit further to the left people tend to see the state as the instance providing justice for reasonable citizens who are not taken care of by the market.

¹⁹"Ask not what your country can do for you – ask what you can do for your country." – John F. Kennedy

²⁰We touch on national liberation and separation briefly below.

to be found in the societal set-up – and to either criticise it or to simply accept it as a given, most people proceed this disappointment with nationalist answers. Some put them forward in their pure forms, others mix and match.

Idealists insist on the misunderstanding that their virtuous materialism must be realisable at least *in principle*. Next or above the existing law they put an ideal of the law which should be realised. Left-wing parties like Respect with their demands to “tax the rich” fall into this category: they place their ideal of the state above the actual state. The not so left-wing demand “British jobs for British workers” follows the same logic. The materialist starting point is still plainly visible, this ideology insists that the fundamental order should allow these just interests to be satisfied.

Righteous people also start from the violation of their private interests. They notice a damage, which causes them to complain. They too insist that the fundamental order is not hostile, be it the market economy or the nation-state. They are proud because they live according to these principles which they accept. Searching for a cause of their harm, they end up identifying people who violated these just principles. As a corollary, neither them nor ‘their’ society is responsible for their hardship. People who do nothing but complain about the fact that ‘we’ have to pay for ‘their’ mess in the aftermath of the financial crisis, do not want to push through their interests – not even in principle. Righteous people accept austerity measures and pay cuts, but would never leave out the point that they are not responsible for it. This is where righteous criticism stops and thus in the most consequent form of this position a direct link to improving one’s conditions is missing. However virtuous the materialism was they started off with, it is absent in the end of this train of thought.

Fascists, on the contrary, conclude that it is the system that is to blame since those cheeky private interests pursued by others are not sufficiently restricted. They claim that these private interests ruin the nation. They demand that these violating interests are suppressed by the state such that the general public interest can prevail. They do not allow for the contradiction between the private and public interest, they demand identification. Virtuous materialists want the general public interest as the precondition of their private interests, fascists want the private interests to be expressions of the general public interest.²¹ Fascists finally put the nation as an end in itself, surpassing all other interests. They are the most consequential nationalists, the apotheosis of nationalism.

Attitude towards the outside

First and foremost nationalism is an ideology of identification with the nation. However, it is also the basis for citizens to pass a negative judgement on their own kind – i.e. other citizens – if they are from abroad – i.e. not citizens of the home country. To explain why this is not some individual ‘moral failure’ one needs to look at the material basis for this belittlement. That this world is divided into nation-states and that no nationalist dreams of inviting all of human kind into the fatherland is evident.²² So far so general. Apartment complexes too are divided into flats and rarely do neighbours invite each other to move in. However, nation-states do not exist side by side, relatively unaffected by each other, at most exchanging a more or less friendly nod when they meet in the hallway, to stick to the analogy. They engage on the same world market, have disputes over land and people and compete for power and resources: they compete against each other. Some states are outright hostile towards each other (such as Iran and the UK currently), some form alliances in order to push their own agendas (e.g., NATO and WTO members) and some even argue about their *common* currency (e.g., Germany and Greece). The world is full of nation-states claiming to execute the general public interest and each nation-state is confronted with its peers disputing this claim. From the UK perspective French interests are usually *only* French interests (when in disagreement) and British interests are usually just, global and necessary. Vice versa the other way around. That under these conditions the attitude towards foreign states and their citizens is usually not indifferent or even positive is no surprise.

The belittlement of other nations is a logical consequence of the appreciation of one’s own if interests between them conflict. However, this does not imply that someone fond of his nation must draw that conclusion. Insofar the separation between ‘patriotism’ and ‘nationalism’ – addressed at the beginning of this article – is indeed possible. Even though we do not believe most ‘patriots’ that they do not make this transition from just loving their own country to belittling others, uncovering pejorative thoughts on foreigners is not a worthy task. The admitted identification with the nation provides sufficient material for critique; the task cannot be to prove that someone’s ideology is secretly something else, but to show how this ideology itself is wrong and harmful.

National separation and liberation

Some are indeed fundamentally unhappy with their subordination under the state they live in.

If they cannot or do not want to join another nation and are not critical of state domination as such, they have two options left: to change the political system of the state or to found a new one. Both national separation and liberation movements perceive that the power they are subordinated to has too little or nothing to offer to them. Their cause is to correct this mistake; to establish a just domination by their own kind. Even where the material basis for the virtuous materialism is missing, nationalist movements apply this ideal.

Separatists base their disagreement on the ‘finding’, that there is a second unity within the nation which differs and should be equipped with its own power apparatus. The material basis for this observation is often a lack of or a rather slack application of equal treatment. Whatever the foundation myths of their ‘nation’ might be, their actually commonality is their oppression. In most cases, it is this oppression which creates this group and respectively the corresponding movements.

For example, the Turkish state suppresses Kurdish customs and language. Kurds are not treated as subjects equal before the law, but they are confronted with a general suspicion of disloyalty and of undermining the unity of the nation. Kurds might have formal citizenship but they do not experience the invitation of the state to use its power to pursue their own interests like other Turkish citizens do. The consequence the Kurdish liberation movement draws from this observation is the demand for their own state. In Turkey nationhood is, as usual, asserted by force and the movement towards another nationalism, the Kurdish nationalism, is not welcomed at all by the Turkish state.²³

It wants all its citizens to be committed to itself, not to another state (to be). The forceful assertions by the Turkish military who has the monopoly on violence further encourages the separatist movement. Separatist movements for their part often re-enact the state’s discrimination by referring positively to the division made by the authorities.

Those who want to liberate a pre-existing nation observe the hostility of the state they live in towards the majority of the population. Neither do they challenge the conception of the nation nor do they deny the need for a matching domination. They just insist that the current one caters to foreign or minority interests instead of the nation. Most of these movements, after seizing power, did not improve the livelihood of their populations since they did not challenge the basic tenets of the economic conditions, they merely aimed at swapping out the political (and economical) personnel. However, one might wonder, there are indeed states where after such a national liberation a higher living

²¹The national-socialist slogan “you are nothing, your people is everything” is an apt summary of this idea. While John F. Kennedy presupposes a separation between the private interest and the national interest when he asks the citizens to ponder what they can do for the nation, this separation is not accepted by the fascists.

²²While political Islam is an ideology which shares many features with nationalism, this is something that sets it apart. It indeed welcomes all human kind into the Umma, the collective of all Muslims, once they converted to become ‘true believers’.

²³The politics regarding the ‘Kurdish question’ is a battle field of the political establishment in military and bureaucracy and the upcoming elite of AKP.

²⁴If one considers Cuba a good project or not is not the question here. Likeable or not, the least to say about it is that this state is certainly not a prime example of striving for capitalist accumulation. That is all, this case serves for here. Also, this is not meant as a contribution to the debate whether ‘socialism in one country’ is viable.

standard for the population could be observed such as Cuba,²⁴ a state which disengaged from the world market and expropriated big capitalists within its borders. Is such a nationalism not a sign that nationalism can appeal to people to get them enthusiastic about a different organisation of society? If successful, would that not be helpful in challenging the capitalist mode of production? Indeed, improving healthcare, provision, literacy – who would argue against that? However, this does not rescind the truth that national collectives are forced collectives and that the myths about them remain wrong. On top of that, it is strange to rally for the interests of the people, for their provision, for *them* in the name of *something else*; be it Christian love, national solidarity, the glory of socialism, history or true human nature. If a project which ostensibly is about improving the livelihood of the people appeals to something other than the abolishment of poverty and domination, this is a clue that this project is at least not only about those advancements.

Both separatist and liberating nationalist move-

ments observe a nation-state which appears clearly hostile towards the people they claim to represent. From that observation one could learn about the nature of the nation-state and oppose it. However, these movements have so much appreciation for the very subject which suppresses them that they want one of their own. Their main experience with the nation-state is one of suppression with brute-force. But even this demonstration of the obnoxious quality of such a power apparatus does not manage to convince them of the undesirability of such a thing. All the skull crushing exercised in the name of the nation does not crush the thought that the nation is a desirable thing. This does not diminish their bad experience, but this experience does not justify their conclusion.

So, why anti-national?

First, nationalism simply is not correct: no myth about the foundation of nations can be

substantiated and from none of the proposed criteria follows endorsement of the nation (or the nation-state). This is argument enough to show that the ideology has nothing to do with ending domination and exploitation.

Second, any nation is a forced collective, it is the result of domination. Appreciation for the nation is appreciation for domination.

Third, nationalism is an ideology of sacrifice. It presents a cause – the nation – which ostensibly justifies to soft-pedal on one's own needs.²⁵ On top of that, in capitalist societies – which always mean mass poverty – it justifies scarcity. It stands in diametrical opposition to the demand for luxury for everyone.

Fourth, any legitimisation being put forward for people to come to terms with exploitation and subordination deserves critique. One of the most powerful ideologies accomplishing this is nationalism, the idea of some sort of natural belonging to a context of subordination and its offers to make sense of the misery experienced everyday.



²⁵This does not mean that any cut back is always unreasonable. If in a planned economy there was, say, a huge storm destroying lots of soy crops. For someone not vegan it could make sense to leave the soy milk for the vegans for as long as there is a severe shortage. It would make sense in reflection on the mutual dependency in division of labour and the realisation that this mode of production is beneficial for oneself. The later is not given in capitalism, its severe shortages are perpetually produced not the exception.

Games, entertainment and competition between states

It just does not stop, they do it every two years. Athletes come together to compare their stamina, strength and skill. This year, it happened in Vancouver and in two years time London will be the city the whole world will be watching ... on the telly. By and large this seems like a rather harmless event and most people would shake their heads in disbelief when they hear that this was a very political affair. We do it anyway.¹

First of all, these athletes do not compete by themselves, for themselves and in their own name only but always too as representatives of a particular country – namely that country which issued their passports. It may seem self-evident that they – in this position – collect victories and defeats for that issuing nation. Just as self-evident as the fact that spectators support ‘their’ athletes², that is the athletes sent by their own state. Thus, this is more than just a simple comparison of physical strength and stamina of individuals and groups of individuals.

Even though nothing actually depends on the outcome of these games for the states involved – neither Canada, China nor the UK will have any direct advantage if their athletes collect more gold medals than others – states are heavily involved and support their teams.³ Without their involvement these kind of events were hardly possible. The associations in which athletes are organised and which are responsible for organising competitions (for the Olympics these are the international and the national Olympic committees) receive a bulk of their funding and infrastructure from the state. In the host nation stadiums and other infrastructure are built and financed by the state.

Why do states do that? The only thing that can possibly come out of this are the cheers by the masses⁴ and the prestige of victories. This is where the political character of this suppos-

edly athletics-only event shows rather clearly: the cheers and the flag-waving are anything but apolitical. In this act everyone involved recognises the subordination under the principle of the nation. Whether flag-wavers and anthem-singers know it or not: they join in singing the national chorus simply by referring to the national bond. And it is this bond which is used to justify nation-states with their permanent submission. These cheers are signs of rejoicing in membership in this grand setup and indicative of an identification with athletes, based on nothing but the shared nationality. ‘Our’ team is expected to bring home victories; they are expected to ennoble the nation with their triumphs in the field of ideal competition among states.

It is on ‘home soil’⁵ where the involved states can benefit especially from staged sport events. The state which hosts the games receives some extra international reputation – it has the opportunity to present itself in a unique manner.⁶ For instance, in 2008 when China was hosting the Summer Olympics and rumours were floating around they could not pull it off, it went to extreme lengths and through extreme amounts of money to host the games.⁷ It wanted to represent itself as a serious actor on the international stage – in every aspect. Every state does this, be it in sports, music or whatnot. Just like any other state China does not get a discount on the world market as a pat on the back for successfully hosted games. But it gets a chance to represent how powerful it deems itself. To an extent, all other powers recognise this by taking part.⁸ The goal is that extra bit of recognition. Whether the host country achieves this or whether other states seize this opportunity to embarrass it is a different question.

This depends on whether other states respect the representation of strength of a competitor or whether they challenge it. For the registra-

tion and enforcement of national interests of any kind a state’s recognition is a necessary precondition. Since today’s world is almost entirely *composed* of capitalist nation states and heavily *dominated* by the few most successful ones, all states heavily depend on the recognition by those Western states.

Where this recognition is not granted, the respective nations will not be dealt with – neither economically nor politically. Other nations are questioned even more: their existence is simply denied, meaning they are questioned by military means or get their economy devastated by a complete trade boycott for example. Then the sovereignty, the highest possession of any state, is worth nothing and must again be won with force. If a state’s sovereignty is recognised in practice (that is the borders of that country are respected insofar as no foreign soldiers march across them) but not *de jure*, (that is it is ignored insofar as others do not contract with it, have no diplomatic relationships), then being part of worldwide competition is rather difficult.

Like all states – generally recognised or not – poor countries and in particular those which are not recognised must respect the rules set by the IMF, the World Bank etc. but they are not involved in deciding them. In the global market, every nation-state competes in order to further its own interests and to harness the agendas of its competitors for its own advantage. If a state is denied to pursue its interests on the international stage, it has little influence. That is why so much emphasis is put on recognition in every round of fisticuffs, contract and war. All this does not mean that engaging in the arena of international sports is a necessary prerequisite for fully functioning nation-states – but it is one mode of acting out the necessary competition between them.

¹This article is based on a leaflet distributed by Junge Linke gegen Kapital und Nation in 2008.

²Some more eagerly than others. During the 2010 Winter Olympics the Australian freestyle skier Dale Begg-Smith was referred to as “villain” and “traitor” in the Canadian media, his Canadian competitor as “hero”. Dale Begg-Smith was born with a Canadian passport but emigrated to Australia because the Canadian sports association would not allow him to have an Internet start-up on the site.

³Gordon Brown even wrote British athletes a correctly spelled letter: “The whole nation is behind you – as ambassadors not only for your sport and your country, but also for London 2012.”

⁴Gordon Brown in the aforementioned letter to the British team: “When Britain won the right to host the Summer Games in 2012, we did it with a promise to inspire a generation of young people in this country. And as Great Britain’s team for the Vancouver Winter Olympics, you are now the most important torchbearers of that promise. Nothing has more power to inspire young people than seeing our best athletes competing at the very pinnacle of their sport. While you’re away, it will be hard to truly appreciate the impact that your performances over the next fortnight will be having at home.” Of course, he is not eyeing for hundreds of thousands of young people to join the Olympics any time soon. Rather, he wants to inspire young people ‘at home’ to achieve their best in whatever they are doing. For most people this means dragging themselves to a shitty job for little pay every day, that is to put up with the conditions they are subjected to by the very same state Gordon Brown represents. David Cameron hammers home the message in case anyone did not get it: “If the Conservatives are in government, David Cameron is likely to find himself at his mid-term nadir, reviled for the pain he has had to inflict, and waiting for signs of the good times he promised would follow. No wonder he is talking privately of the Olympics as the ‘turning point’ that could restore national morale and get him off the hook in time for a general election.” – <http://is.gd/8CdxC>

⁵The most prominent and well-publicised Canadian narrative for the recent 2010 Olympic Winter Games in Vancouver was, quite literally, the quest to finally win Gold on ‘home soil’, which had not been achieved at the two previous Games the country hosted.

⁶“In summary, Canada will be an international stage for a theatrical performance that can significantly affect Canada’s international reputation, and we are all players.” writes a commentator for the Vancouver Observer at <http://is.gd/8BJvq>

⁷Same closer to home. The Summer Olympics 2012 already had their budget increased when it became apparent that the estimated budget would not suffice. Downsizing is not an option.

⁸When the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan one year prior to the 1980 Olympics in Moscow, US president Carter made sure that no US athlete took part in those games – this is what it looks like when a state does not want to show this recognition. Towards China no state dared or cared to take this step in 2008.

“You mean they actually vote for the lizards?”

... “Oh yes”, said Ford with a shrug, “of course”. “But”, said Arthur, going for the big one again, “why?” “Because if they didn’t vote for a lizard,” said Ford, “the wrong lizard might get in.”¹

1 The modern democratic state² exercises considerable power over its subjects. There is hardly any aspect of life for which no law exists. There are laws regarding the length of the working day; the number of breaks during that day; mandatory school education; how much time a pub must grant a patron for finishing her drink after the bar has closed; how a landlord has to keep and secure his tenant’s deposit; what happens if someone accidentally gets injured during a football game; when a newspaper can be banned from printing a story; what may or may not be said in public; whether sex shops may put their goods on display; the illegality of dying in the Houses of Parliament; how much toxic waste is tolerable and how much punishment will be meted out if one should break its law. This state demands to decide on matters of life and death of its citizens – the latter mainly in times of war. In all this, the state allows no other power over its subjects, it insists on having the monopoly on violence. In short, this state leaves almost nothing unregulated and considers almost nothing outside of its responsibility; it demands control. It demands to be *the* ultimate force in society.

2 This demand stands in stark contrast to the mantra of modern democracies that ‘the people’ have sovereignty³. It is indeed true that every three to five years the state asks its subjects to cast a vote. In particular, the state asks its subjects, collectivised as ‘the people’, which representatives should be given the power to pass laws. Indirectly, the state – directed by the government – even asks who should form the next government. It is worth appreciating for a moment that this vote does not stop at some meagre local council or other lower ranks of the state. Instead, this vote in all seriousness, actuality and full colour does decide who sits in parliament⁴ and ultimately *who* will form the government. The majority of voters – restricted by some regulations⁵ – decide *who* will sit in that

parliament which decides how long they have to finish their beer after closing. The majority of the voters do choose who will form that very government which decides over life and death. *This* decision, the people make.

3 However, taking a closer look at such an election, it becomes apparent that the voting regime or decision-making process does not grant voters all that much power.

- Political parties⁶ present their respective political programme to the voters. It is not the other way around⁷, where for instance people might tell the parties what they are most concerned about in everyday life and these parties could then propose their fixes to these issues.
- All party programmes are always a complete package of policies. A voter cannot cherry pick certain issues, goals, demands and vote for those only.
- There is no way on the ballot to tell a party why one voted for it; which points matter, which do not and which ones the voter disagrees with.
- Neither is there a way of giving only conditional support.
- After the election, MPs are not even liable for following their own programmes and promises, let alone the wishes of those who elected them.
- Fundamental conditions of life such as the economic or political system⁸ are not balanced at all.

The act of election is a rather restricted act where no substantial content is actually *decided*. Understanding this, alleging that voters yield real sovereignty (meaning that they are in control) is plainly wrong. Instead, it makes sense to say that through the act of election parliament and government become sovereign, their power is legitimised. On the one hand, MPs are not bound to any mandate by the voters. On the other hand, they can and do refer to the voters’ will while pursuing their agenda. If

protest and unrest spreads against their policies they do not have to bow to the pressure from the streets. Instead they can point to the fact that they were elected by ‘the people’. A democratic election legitimises the power of the government.

4 The outcome of an election is a powerful government, measured by all the things it can decide. However, its time in office is potentially ended by the next election. The institution of regular elections expresses and institutionalises a certain mistrust in the government. It expresses a certain lack of confidence that a government once in power will actually pursue the general public interest instead of mainly its own private interests. But what does general public interest mean in a society based on competition? It can hardly mean the fulfilment of individual interests of every citizen since these interests are usually in opposition. A tenant wants to live cheaply, a landlord wants high rent; a toothbrush factory wants cheap labour and cheap energy, workers want ‘fair wages’ and the electricity supplier ‘cost-covering prices’. The only thing all competitors, in their role as competitors, share is their interest in being able to take part in competition itself; economically they want to compete, because they have to. The state makes sure of this through its guarantee of private property. First of all, everyone is excluded from the things they need. On the other hand, since all material wealth, including that stuff others need, is in the hands of private owners; one’s own property becomes the means to get access to someone else’s property; that is, through the act of exchange. Thus, private property is both the exclusion from material wealth and the only means to overcome this exclusion, making everybody dependent on it. This founds an interest in the conditions of competition, the only means available to the subjects.

In the name of this general public interest all private interests must be restricted. This applies to politicians as well. A corrupt politician is elected despite him being corrupt, not because of it. Being crooked is an obstacle in the proper carrying out of a job which is about the facilitation of the general public interest. The ideal

¹Douglas Adams. *So long, and thanks for all the fish*. Chapter 36. 1984

²Arguing about democratic elections and illustrating these arguments with a country which is quite explicit about not being a genuine democracy is a bit difficult. For clarity of presentation, we will develop the main arguments with respect to straight-forward democracies in the main text and discuss differences in the UK in footnotes. Also, the constitution in the UK is uncodified which complicates the presentation to some extent. The resulting differences are not that fundamental in practice, but are noteworthy when talking about the legal ideal.

³In the UK the Queen or King – not ‘the people’ – has sovereignty.

⁴Only the House of Commons in the UK. The House of Lords is appointed.

⁵County borders, electoral systems, minimum percentage hurdles ...

⁶Some countries have political systems which put more emphasis on political parties while others put more emphasis on the individual candidates. In Germany political parties are provided with special care and protection. For example, only the Supreme Court can ban a party. It did exercise this right twice. First, by banning a party for continuation of the nation-socialist NSDAP and second in 1956 when the Communist Party was banned. This ban in principle includes all communist parties founded afterwards. However, since the 1970s communist parties were allowed to exist again in order to improve relations with the East.

⁷To avoid a misunderstanding: pointing out how something would be the other way around does not imply partiality.

⁸The absoluteness of the political system is expressed in the statement that “no Parliament can pass laws that future Parliaments cannot change” (<http://www.parliament.uk/about/how/laws/sovereignty.cfm>). Certainly, any law which would strip the right from the parliament to make such laws on behalf of ‘the people’ would violate this statement. Democracy itself is not decided on by a ballot.

⁹The outrage about a bunch of MPs claiming expenses on second and third homes is a good illustration of this ideal. For the budget these claims do not matter much, what caused the outrage was the lack of standards and ‘character’ exercised by these ‘role models’.

politician is one who does not think about himself⁹, his friends or colleagues. The ideal politician is of an exemplary moral character. It is a rather frightening idea in the heads of bourgeois subjects that their immediate competitor might one day seize state power and use this power to further his own private agenda.

Correspondingly, all big parties express their will to further the general public interest and stress that in their respective programmes. No successful party in the UK only caters to the special interests of a particular social group. The times of a workers' party are over. New Labour's victory in 1997 was an expression of this opening and the Conservatives aimed for the same broad appeal in the 2010 national election. Even fringe left-wing parties like Respect bow to the dictates of 'realism' and respect private property through their demands of "taxation on the big corporations and the wealthy to fund public services"¹⁰ – a demand which requires big corporations to make the kind of profits which can then be taxed. A taxation that was too aggressive would threaten the government's revenue and thus its means to fund the NHS, pensions and decent housing.

The common feature of all these political parties is their affirmation of the basic principles of the capitalist economy¹¹. All democratic parties want the democratic state which uses and fosters the accumulation of capital as the basis of its power. They even seek to steer it.

5 It is a prerequisite for the legitimacy of any government to be that both the voters and the defeated parties accept its victory after the election. This might seem self-evident at first and thus this fact is only recognised when it is violated. For example, the legitimacy of George W. Bush's first term in office was somewhat tattered after a series of re-countings and bans of re-countings of votes in the state of Florida. For another more severe example we can turn to Iran where the opposition claims to have won the election despite the official announcement of the contrary. These disagreements can mark the transition into civil war.

On the other hand, a successful election draws the people and the state together. This is necessary because during session the opposition between citizens and the government is plainly visible and reinforced: The government's job is to restrict or negate the interests of its citizens in the general public interest. The pledge of allegiance to the state enacted by voting maintains and makes feasible the contradiction between compulsion and consent¹². Through the

choice of the personnel of domination, domination itself does not appear as such but instead is recognised as a service provided to the voters.

6 A successful election accomplishes more than a formal consent to domination. It is important for the overall working of the state that the ideology of the voters matches the programmes of the government to some extent. A fundamental opposition between citizenry and state could undermine the governments power to implement its schemes and programmes, it could threaten the basis on which both the legitimacy and the power of the government is built.

This reinforcement of ideology is partly accomplished by the political education provided during election campaigns. Running up to an election the voters are asked to leave their personal perspective behind and instead take on a bird's eye view. While most consumers of newspapers do this on a regular basis, during the election campaigns everybody is encouraged to take on this perspective even more. The voter is introduced to and presented with the necessities of the state. Political parties present 'inherent necessities' not as their own deed but as a 'reality' which confronts them just as well: in times of crisis banks must be stabilised, growth must be restarted, the deficit may not grow 'too large', the health care system must be reformed etc. Anyone from welfare recipient to banker is encouraged to not worry about the next paycheck for a while. But instead everybody is encouraged to ponder how to decrease the deficit and other such things. Of course, it is relatively unlikely that any creative idea from the minds of an ordinary voter would ever be implemented, but a likely outcome is at least an agreement on what the pressing issues are.

Indeed, managing these necessities is a prerequisite for everyone wanting to and having to realise their own private interests such as receiving the next paycheck. Since there are many mutually exclusive interests, each voter is encouraged to consider 'fair' solutions to these problems. A good politician – one of the kind voters put in office – has to continuously balance interests and carefully restrict private interests in the name of the general public interest.

7 Even for the ones disgruntled with the current government there are political parties available to vote for: the opposition.

On the one hand, they blame the government for not exercising its control properly. They deny the expertise of the current government to tackle the issues facing the nation. Usually, this

remains somewhat vague in order to attract diffuse discontent. The Tories followed this strategy for the national election in 2010. On the other hand, they criticise the government for its policies and claims that with their own alternative programmes the problems they have identified would not occur. Left-wing parties for instance claim that mass poverty was unnecessary and within capitalism the problem could be solved quickly once they were in power and could tax the rich appropriately. Thus poverty was not a necessity of the mode of production which the state fosters for its own sake. Instead poverty was an unnecessary result of the wrong people in management.

Democratic opposition directs critique to its decent content. That is, a content which is supportive of the state. It is an invitation to the voter to solve her problem with politics by replacing the politicians. The common anti-critical statement 'if you do not vote you cannot complain' expresses this demand for subordination rather clearly. According to this it is beyond consideration that the election itself might be subject to critique.

8 A successful election, both with respect to its formal act and its political content, requires voters who worry about such things. A person who considers an election to be an adequate expression of his political actions wants a strong government which is capable of acting, regardless of how it is composed and what it does. That person considers the existence of a government as a prerequisite for carrying out his own interests. That voter accepts the outcome of an election, even if it does not correspond to his choice. He accepts David Cameron as 'our prime minister' even if he did not vote for him. Such persons more often than not accept austerity measures imposed by a government even though it worsens their livelihood.

This ideology which wants 'effective governance' meets its adequate match in the public obsession with the character of politicians. If no question of substance is actually left to the voter; when all she can choose is a candidate who is not liable; when someone is to be elected to facilitate the general public interest in a society based on competition; when the outcome of this election must be a strong government, *then* the question of what kind of person gets elected does indeed become relevant. Thus, the outcry about the apolitical voters who care more about gossip than proper politics is unfounded. This interest in politics is the kind of interest this political system asks from its subjects.

¹⁰ Respect Manifesto (<http://www.therespectparty.net/manifesto.php>)

¹¹ The Socialist Party of Great Britain is a notable exception to this rule. The SPGB "claims that there can be no state in a socialist society" and "that socialism will, and must, be a wageless, moneyless, worldwide society of common (not state) ownership". The SPGB "seeks election to facilitate the elimination of capitalism by the vast majority of socialists, not to govern capitalism." (<http://www.worldsocialism.org/spgb/differences.html>) Leaving aside for the moment of whether this is a good strategy or not, it is clear from their party programme that the SPGB does not affirm the basic principles of the capitalist economy.

¹² "When people put their ballots in the boxes, they are, by that act, inoculated against the feeling that the government is not theirs. They then accept, in some measure, that its errors are their errors, its aberrations their aberrations, that any revolt will be against them. It's a remarkably shrewd and rather conservative arrangement when one thinks of it." – John Kenneth Galbraith, *The Age of Uncertainty* (1977), Ch. 12, p. 330

Proud to be . . . So what?

On the relationship between emancipation and collective identities

Identity is the forced community of individuals

When the term identity is applied to a person, a reasonable interpretation would be to understand it as signifying their self-awareness as a thinking entity in a material body, both of which – in this dyadic union – are forced to endure a great deal in this society already, well before acquiring the capacity of even thinking in such terms. But all humans are also branded with another type of identity: They are combined into groups according to their ‘sex’, gender, nationality, ‘race’, sexual desire and a plethora of other categories. This is more than just a harmless indication of a person’s physical characteristics, the pigmentation of their skin or whom they happen to be in love with. To a considerable degree, this sorting influences one’s material circumstances, psychological state and even the duration of one’s existence.

“One is not born a woman, but becomes one”

With this truth, feminist critics have unmasked the differences asserted by various (social) groups as socially constructed, well over sixty years ago. Without fail, all people are subsumed under any given number of collective identities. They are ascribed qualities and behavioural patterns which are attributed to their alleged ‘essence’. Predications of ethnicity, gender, ‘race’, sexual orientation, (dis)ability or class manifest themselves as essentialist judgements. The people in question are subjected to binding statements which aim at fundamentally defining their lives, their thoughts as well as their actions. In that process they are being differentiated from one part of humanity while a strong bond is constructed with another, with whom they are supposed to share a common fate. Many of these statements are simply false (“all black men have large penises”), some are undue generalisations (“all British people drink warm beer” and “all Canadians wear tuques”), and even where a particular attribution actually does characterise a large number of people (“homo homini lupus”), it is socially produced. All this is not the same as saying that “all footballers are idiots,” which would be no more than a polemic conclusion, equating a social practice with someone’s propensity for reasoning, in order to attack a sports craze. One can stop playing football at any time, while one cannot stop being black. An attribution based purely on social practice is a distinctly differ-

ent thing than one based on someone’s supposed nature¹. As soon as an essentialist judgement has been coined and socially established, the people affected by it have no choice but to react to it: judgements must be refuted, positively or negatively adopted – or criticised. In some cases, the affected groups may even break up into sub-collectives in the course of the debate over different strategies of response. These judgements are all the more severe wherever they are part of strategies of discrimination or even form the legitimisation for the exclusion or oppression of a particular group. That is wherever such judgements are taken as proof for any given group’s inferiority and serve as the basis for their subjugation.

“We draw our power from the stream against which we swim”

Any member of such groups is faced with the existence of these judgements. They are not only part of a social practice that is directed against them, but they are present even in their own self-perception, their fears and desires. These judgements are generally present in people’s minds: they are uttered, hinted at, widely believed and thereby reproduced not only by members of the hegemonic culture but by those who themselves belong to the oppressed group in question, as well. No-one has a choice but to acknowledge these judgements and to deal with them. How one deals with them, however, is not equally definite. They can be accepted or refuted, given positive or negative connotations, one can distance themselves from them individually or accept them as a general truth, or they can be explained and fought as one part of an objectionable whole. Wherever people strive to end their own oppression, a fundamental critique of its legitimisation is key. Here are only a few examples of movements (respectively the vast majority of those movements, leaving aside the few less affirmative political approaches in the mentioned movements) which failed to effectively formulate this essential critique on a consensual basis²:

- The working class opposed the theories of the tutelage of the “dangerous classes” and the necessary barbarism of the working poor by singing the praises of the lower classes’ productivity in a direct critique of the non-working classes. With this, the proletariat in the West achieved legitimate status as part of the nation³; an achievement, however, which did not mark the beginning but rather the end

of the socialist branch of the workers’ movement and ultimately reduced class struggle to a fight over wage levels instead of fighting against being the economically exploited ones always.

- The Women’s Rights Movement demanded equality for women as citizens, discovered women’s integral role for any society and challenged their reduction to objects of sexual desire and biological reproduction by championing the fight for recognition of women as subjects with the ability and the right to make their own decisions and the capacity of defining their own ends. Some parts of the feminist movement that do even question an adaptation to the status quo in general propagate a female counter-society.
- The African-American Civil Rights Movement in the United States refuted the claim of their natural inferiority with the discovery that history has known many artists and warriors with a heavier skin pigmentation, that Africa is the origin of civilisation and that black is beautiful. Their achievement was that black men and women are legally equally free to forge their own proverbial destiny. The inevitable disappointment over the limits of this kind of freedom and the still widespread practical racism finds an adequate expression in the shape of the “Black Muslim” movement, namely by demanding a racially pure nation in its own right.
- Since the first Christopher Street Day, the Gay Rights Movement has held that being gay is a reason to be ‘proud’. By coming out in droves to get their marriage licenses wherever possible, large parts of the gay community have dispelled all rumours alleging their inherent inability to commit due to a solipsistic narcissism, supposedly essential to homosexuality. At the same time, the persevering myth of homosexual effeminacy is being refuted by displays of gay machismo and military prowess around the world. The message is: ‘real men’ love ‘real men’. It is no coincidence that nowadays there are even gay and lesbian Tories: Thereby proving that most gays do not want to fight a society that produces homophobia – but to overcome the discrimination by being a perfect part of that very same society.
- As a result of the rampant anti-Semitism of the 19th and 20th centuries, the Jewish communities of Europe and North America were roughly divided into Zionists, who strove to

¹This is not say that one can or should always differentiate whether a given identity is natural or a social practice. Among ourselves we disagree whether any classification into groups already deserves critique or not. What we agree on however is the critique of any essentialist classification which entails domination of the classified.

²Just to make it a little harder to misread: The following movements are listed in order to analyse a common mistake when challenging a discrimination against a group. It is not the subject of this article to identify the content of racism, anti-Semitism, sexism etc.

³On a critique of referring positively to one’s nation, see “Why anti-national?” at the beginning of this edition.

find a safe new home for this ‘unrooted nation’, on the one side, and, on the other, ‘citizens of the Jewish faith’, who refused to split their loyalties between a Jewish state and their country of birth. These are the two major positions⁴. Today, many in contemporary Israeli society take issue with the production of a collective identity based on religious denomination. The Social-Democratic successors of the originally Socialist Zionist movement more often than not find themselves in the position of having to share government with religious zealots.

All these cases have in common that it was neither the division into groups as such, nor the reasons for this division, let alone the structure of society itself, that were challenged, but merely the results these divisions produce. The goal of all of the movements mentioned above is first and foremost their own integration into the respective hegemonic societies. Wherever this is prevented by the rules of said societies, it produces segregationist movements in their own right, whose new goal is the creation of another community altogether, in which their group will then be the majority.

“I wasn’t born there / Perhaps I’ll die there / There’s no place left to go, San Francisco.”

Since the focus of this text is on identity politics as a means of liberation, the identity politics of the ‘oppressors’ will only feature as a negative. All those who are not or have not been fully recognised as proper subjects of the law have to distance or differentiate themselves from this identity politics of the majority. They have to in order to be able to fundamentally change the conditions which produce such attributions.

To do this, it is not enough to simply understand the problem. The realisation that these attributions and the divisions they produce are socially constructed does not by itself put an end to their internalisation. The unease with which a worker faces a bureaucrat; the willingness to accept an abusive partner, simply because “stand by your man” is such a nice motto; the hatred of one’s own dark skin, produced by a white ideal of beauty; the fear of losing one’s family as a result of coming-out; the presence of anti-Semitic stereotypes even in Jewish communities: These are only a few common examples illustrating the tenacity of these ideologies. People continually judge not only others

but also themselves based on the norms laid out by a bourgeois, white, heterosexual, healthy, male world. Even a simple inversion (gay pride, black power etc.) presupposes a general adherence to these norms. They are reflected even in the deepest fears and/or desires of the individual (e.g. female menstruation, male fear of penetration, sexual attraction based on skin colour). The prerequisite for overcoming these practices is the formulation of an appropriate critique. However, under the current conditions it seems highly unlikely, if not impossible, for this internalisation to disappear completely. On the one hand, these categories are so closely linked to self-constitution that transcending them is a process that is both painful and laborious. On the other hand, even if an individual manages to overcome these attributions, they remain the basis for a host of social practices that one cannot individually withdraw from – not even in form of a counter-culture – since they are still determining factors for the actions of other people all around oneself. They are present in mass culture, in the autobiographic stories and concepts of others. This ubiquity engenders experiences of non-belonging: Every time someone speaks about what is common and acceptable, they are distinctly not speaking about me. I am an unforeseen anomaly.

It is this constant state of alienation, produced by the social practices of authority and people alike, which makes it so hard for most to deviate from the norm and even deters some from doing so entirely. It is the same feeling which makes alternative communities and sub-cultures appear so attractive. They are free spaces in which people share the same experiences of oppression and ostracism: You are not alone. Many activists and people on the Left are familiar with this scenario, as well. The knowledge that one is not completely isolated in one’s deviant opinions and practices may not be necessary for a critical assessment of the status quo, but it most certainly does not hurt. The feeling of not having to start every discussion or argument at square one and the confirmation that it is okay to be the way you are provide a considerable degree of comfort. Strength in numbers is certainly also helpful when it comes to putting shared critical theories into sociopolitical practice. But, at the same time, giving in to this desire for normalcy means abandoning the process of probing all desires and behaviour for their rational foundation – a process which is indispensable for an emancipated life. The truth of an argument does not rely on the number of people who believe it.

Don’t you need society?

Such is the crux of all politics of affirmation – that is any politics whose goal it is to facilitate the emancipation of oppressed groups by affirming and empowering the members of such groups in their respective collective identities. The best outcome of such an endeavour, short of founding one’s own hegemonic society, is a successful integration into the existing one. It is no accident that the development of counter-identities seems to always be accompanied by constant calls for adaptation from within as well as demands for respecting the choices of those members of the group who have already adapted. Accordingly, ‘Community’ representatives are often masters at self-critically accepting the acknowledgement of the demands of the mainstream as a necessary condition for the integrative process.

The other problem is the regressive tendency towards a homogenisation of subcultures or, in other words, the tendency to turn deviant behaviour into a brand new norm in its own right, be it a specific dress code or allegations of betrayal, should someone dare to stray from the flock and have, say, a heterosexual affair. Not least is the active positive connotation of this ‘other’ essentialism: members of oppressed groups often differ very little from representatives of the mainstream in terms of linking their identity to nature. Tautological claims like “I am what I am” are common occurrences.

Liberté, Égalité, Propriété for all?

Any group campaigning for equal rights is demanding nothing else than the recognition of its members as full citizens of the nation and as equal competitors. Bourgeois society with its promises of equality before the law and general competition seems more than happy to oblige. But even if all legitimisations for their oppression were to be removed or at least considerably mitigated, their identities would retain the potential for the same violence with which they were originally inscribed. Even when it does not manifest itself in outright hatred, terror, or destruction, the stigma of difference itself remains unchanged. It can be (re)produced at will and directed once more against its bearers. For all these reasons, adapting to the demands of bourgeois society is hardly ever an efficient means of emancipation.

⁴There are a few others with yet another approach, like strongly religious anti-Zionists, who oppose the foundation of a state of Israel before the return of the messiah.

Some remarks on homosexuality and homophobia

1 There is no biological determination for being homo-, bi- or heterosexual. All scientific attempts to prove the biological origins of homosexuality rely on finding statistical correlations between sexual preferences and physical attributes. Bigger earlobes, properties and condition of testicles, features of the brain, DNA sequences etc. cannot count as causalities, even if there were correlations within the group under investigation. That is because in order to prove a cohesion, one has to find not only a formal coherence of phenomena, but one with regards to contents. After all, high quantities of men with white beard and red coats around Christmas Eve do not prove that Santa Clause brings the presents. Human sexuality is a specifically societal thing, therefore it is just wrong to look for purely biological determinants or explanations¹.

2 Nature brings with it the material preconditions of the human sexuality: a body equipped with nerves, the brain, diverse fluids etc. But it is society that provides the societal conditions – be it the form of political authority with its rules and acts, the prevailing perceptions, expectations and yearnings among people as well as the available knowledge of sexuality including all stimulants, toys or other utilities. The sexuality's contents and forms however originate from the thinking and feeling of the individual who interprets these (biological) preconditions and (social) requirements.

3 'Nature' appears to be a telling argument to so many people, because their own sexual desires seem to be something not changeable by mere decision. Even if their sexual orientation is changing after all at a point in their lives, they quite commonly think that at that point, they finally have discovered their very own, formerly suppressed and true sexual identity. Modern human beings want to express their true self within and by their sexuality. Here, they also seem to find their identities of being who they really are (not just means of state and capital). Hence, their sexuality and falling in love shall be entirely their own. The long road any civic subject has to take, from birth to developing explicit sexual fantasies and practices, along with a variety of experiences and decisions, thoughts and feelings about desires, objects of desire and habits of the latter, then appears like a long road towards themselves. And all of that is put retrospectively in order to make some sense of it all. When this result is attained, the process is at an end.

4 Sexual inheritance was politically welcomed by the gay movement, because it could be used as an argument against concepts of therapy to reform and to punish gay people. It also came in handy to confront fundamental Christians with the question of why the Lord created gay and lesbian people, if he hates them so much (the notion of sin implicates free will to violate against god's commandments – if homosexuality was inherited, it cannot be a sin). However, the argument is rather defensive and usually helpless, it is always birdbrained, dangerous and has – if the worse comes to the worst – brute consequences. It is *defensive*, because gays appear as determined ninny's, who might really be heteros if they only could. In reality, being gay can be fun and does not harm anyone.² It is *helpless*, since ideologies have long ago been evolved to reconcile the contradiction of the divine creation and the allegedly natural homosexuality ("particular trial", "we love homosexuals, but we hate their sinful lifestyle" etc.). A right-wing moralist will not be dissuaded from his hatred of gays by learning about gay penguins. It is *birdbrained*, because the argument affirms a biologism, which attempts to derive anything from links of amino acids – really anything, from affections to zionism. Thereby human made affairs are transfigured into inalterable matters of nature. And it has *in the last resort brute consequences*: If homosexuality is perceived as an evil evoked by nature, this can lead to the conclusion, that all homosexuals and miscellaneous 'deviators' need to be annihilated.³

5 Humans make their own sexuality, but they do not make it as they please. They cannot simply undo what happened to them by and without their decision and what they made of their experiences. Psychoanalysis once promised to make visible these mechanisms and thereby enable patients to better handle them. That sounded promising for a lot of gay people who were looking for a 'cure' with a psychoanalyst in the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s. Regarding homosexuality, psychoanalysis for decades developed into a form of heteronormative enforcement therapy. Thereby it managed to promote the silliest and most contradictory psychological theories about familial constraints of homosexuality (mothers being too cold, too affectionate, too dominant, too absent – or fathers being too cold, too affectionate, too dominant, too absent). Nowadays, psychologists say 'multifactorial' and at least put on record, that they have no idea where the homos actu-

ally come from either.

6 But that is no deficit, namely because the question itself is rather stupid. Usually, it is a prelude to pathologisation or persecution and turns gays, lesbians, bisexuals and transgender into an anomaly demanding an explanation – instead of putting into question the concept of choosing a partner or fuck buddy by his or her primary or secondary sexual characteristics – of all things. Even if a certain character of build, hairiness or possession of a penis or vagina⁴ can be sexually more or less attractive: a) regarding that question the biological sex is just a matter of likeliness and b) sexual occupation of body attributes is not independent from emotions. For the rest the common idea suggests that love somehow naturally coincides with sexual attraction. But that is not the way it necessarily works.

7 Homo- and heterosexuality are two opposing consequences of the prevalent gender relation, namely the will to fall in love restricted to only one of the two official genders. That is neither logic nor is it a bad thing. Firstly, it means indeed excluding willingly half of the earth's population to find sexually or amorously interesting. If that was the only consequence of all that sexual identity bullshit, one might just shrug and wonder about the differences of taste the same way one marvels at people who are not into spinach. But the world is not like that: sexual identity is more than a mere consolidated verdict of taste.

8 Still, the question of homo- and heterosexuality makes for a lot of agony and violence. The sexual identity bullshit becomes a material force, as soon as it has gripped the masses – also against those, who do not share it. The heterosexual presupposition is even nowadays alienating homosexuals in modern Western societies and that starts before gays and lesbians get beaten up. Every third teenage suicide is said to be linked to homosexuality. The permanent rejection and exclusion of those who love and fuck 'differently', even when meaning no harm or not doing it on purpose, leads to a variety of quirks and oddities. Those are as grim, self-destructive and self-endangering as the darkest excesses of heterosexual sex- and love-life.

9 On top of that, there is all the direct and significant hate and disgust of the non-homosexual world, still widespread outside the

¹ A common and modern extension of the gene debate, which is really an adulteration, says that there is a complex interplay of environmental and biological aspects. Thus, according to this theory, there is a genetic 'disposition' which then meets or strikes social 'factors'. Following that line of thought, one does not have to and also cannot prove anything. The origins of social environments and individual dispositions are mutually referring to each other: What fails to find biological answers, needs to be explained environmentally and vice versa. This way, free will plays no role whatsoever in searching causes for any human habit.

² This is not the attempt to establish the regulation that sex is only alright as long as nobody gets hurt. What we do want to say, though, is that sex is alright as long as nobody gets hurt *unwillingly*.

³ The German National Socialists were by the way not sure, if homosexuality was hereditary or acquired. They tried to figure it out by conducting numerous disgusting experiments.

⁴ Most people insist hereby that those 'primary sexual characteristics' are since birth and not due to a surgery.

glossy brochures of the equal opportunity commissioner. Men and women even in Western states have to fear for their health when labelled “gay” or “lesbian”. Disgust is shown to both. On top of that, lesbians have to deal with the further ignorance by regarding their sexual orientation as a passing phase. Children use the term “gay” for anything somehow daft or not working properly – and it even counts for the worst thing you can say about a male kid.⁵ But being gay is more than just “daft”. The worst thing about male homosexuality still seems to be that men are being fucked and enjoy it⁶. And “getting fucked”, that is, giving up the position of power and becoming an object. Enjoying that means not to be the cool, self-controlled and controlling man. This of course is still the utterly silly male ideal held by most of the male socialised human beings. This ideal is hard to hold on to and demands many sacrifices. The attempt to fulfil it causes a lot of psychological distress. Every person seen to not follow this role model poses a threat. That is why gay men have to experience anything from a stupid chat-up line to being smashed up. This ideal is the meanwhile traditional, but not outdated concept of the successful civic subject of competition⁷, which is beyond its feelings and lust, linked to the silly idea that the right attitude holds a promise of success. While “lesbian” as an insult is not usually used as a synonym for “crap”, being labelled as a lesbian for instance at school usually isolates a person and is meant to be an insult. In Western countries, holding hands among girls is indeed viewed differently than boys doing the same, but if these “playing girls” become “lesbians” eventually, they will also be confronted with physical violence and a lot of contempt. This contempt is – according to the gender image – connected with the sexist view that lesbian women withdraw from the male’s privilege to treat them as sexual object. And it is related to the fact that they do not fulfil their role as wives and mothers in the eyes of the majority of the society.

10 Undoubtedly, the life of gays and lesbians has become a lot easier in Western states com-

pared to some years ago. Since the 1970s, those states have not given up regulation of its citizens’ sexuality altogether, but restructured it based upon new principles. Police surveillance and prosecution of (male) homosexuality declined respectively came to an end.⁸ It allowed a gay subculture to emerge, which back then was all about presenting an alternative draft to civic sex morals. It allowed an extent of liberation veterans are still nostalgic about. But at the same time, it illustrated the matter of fact, that civic society generates its deviations according its own principles – and how far riots and violations still comply with the conventions that they oppose: the model homosexual dating from the 1970s referred to clichés of civic society⁹. In Western and Northern Europe, Canada, Australia and New Zealand, it was this very subculture that with the advent of AIDS became an important junior partner of the state not only in the struggle for public health, but was also serving as a transmission belt bringing civic norms into the rest of the gay scene. Nowadays, the remaining gay organisations are far from any criticism of society – on the contrary, they insistently fight for social acceptance of their ways of life and love. Lesbian subculture on the other hand developed in a context of feminist movement and is as adjusted and as unadjusted as the latter. Since the sexual was not put as much in the foreground, the lesbian movement is less an addressee of sex educational programmes of the state and its health system.

11 From a global perspective on emancipation, there is hardly any reason for optimism. In a lot of states, not only Islamic ones, homosexual emancipation is perceived as corrosion and destructive to the nation – and accordingly, homosexuals are treated as a danger, prosecuted and punished. Those regimes have hardly anything to provide their citizens with, oftentimes not even the shabby opportunity to drudge for someone else’s wealth. Accordingly, those nations are very keen on their citizens’ idealism and fight against Western ‘hedonism’ and ‘individualism’; i.e. that cheeky tale, that capitalism was constantly about the pursuit of individual

happiness, is taken as a threat to the sacrifices made for state and belief. Today, gays – more than lesbians¹⁰ – are prosecuted because they serve as representatives of that model: destroyers of traditional values, deniers of family, marriage and procreation, weakeners of male fighting power for nation and/or Umma¹¹.

12 In many former colonies homosexuality is pictured as a product of colonialism. But homosexual behaviour almost always existed in these societies even before European colonisation. In some cases it was sung about or praised, in other cases it was concealed and simply seen as a natural phase in the development of mostly male sexuality. Nowadays, this behaviour is transformed into a quality of a group which brings gays in the awful situation of serving as a symbol for colonial heritage, Western decadence and above all a lack of male acquittal. All disgusting crap, that in the 19th century European nations pulled through with and against their populations, is being repeated by the underdog nations of Latin America, Africa, Asia and the Caribbean. Unlike a successful accumulation of capital, which they do not manage, they do not have to fear to be inferior in moral formation of their people. At the utmost, it might happen that imperialistic countries every now and then complain about human rights violations in order to make an example of their superiority. Among them not too few countries, which 30 years ago themselves had been putting gays into jail, nowadays have discovered the homo question as an entitlement for imperialistic actions.

13 Within the nation-state questions of ‘integration’ of migrants are regularly combined with the question of homophobia. A typical racist, who usually could not care less about homophobia (if he himself was not a homophobe, to start with), seems to feel invited to find homophobia all over the place – but only within the migrant community. This hints at the problem of any identity politics which only demands that a particular group is no longer excluded from the nation¹².

⁵We do not blame the kid for reasons of political correctness. What we do claim, though, is that the use of this term reflects an underlying judgement.

⁶Gay is only about bending down, the other one is just hardcore (restroom poetry).

⁷Contemporary advice for success for women is to show some strength here and there and for men to work on their soft skills. This is no dissolving of the image of each gender. It is rather an adjustment, in which the reference to the initial role allocation is contained.

⁸As a rule, when modern states chased ‘their’ homosexuals it was limited to male gays. Whether that matter can be explained by contempt of female sexuality in general, or by stronger feelings of menace regarding gay sex on account of penetration by men, or even completely differently – we cannot give a definite answer to this question here. An exception known to us was the Austro-fascist state, which we do not choose to compliment for practising that kind of equal opportunities in prosecution.

⁹Partly, that meant exhibiting a newly self confident individual declaring himself as sexually liberated who refused to abide by the valid codes of civic masculinity. That was merely the positive translation of old clichés for gays as sexual ready and effeminate. That comes off as much more sympathetic than uptight authoritarian petit-bourgeois. But it serves just as much as a new ideal, which gays have to conform with, like “If you sleep with anyone twice, you are a square”. And promiscuity is lustful only if it is fun for those involved, i.e. if it is not a desperate attempt to get a little ego-boost or just a nasty competition. And then, there was the simple turning around of the gender clichés, just doing that with one gender only. That implies malign exclusion of ‘ponces’.

¹⁰We cannot say for sure what the exact reasons are for this gender specificity. It could be because women in these states do not count for fully-fledged human beings and therefore lesbian sexuality is not taken serious. Or it might be, because the violence against women happens at home by father, brother, husband etc. It then would not become public so as not to ruin the honour of the family.

¹¹the religious collective of all Muslims

¹²For a critique on identity politics see “Proud to be ... So what?” in this edition.

Public debt makes the state go round

In May 2010 voters in the UK were asked to decide on the appointment of the state's most important employees for the next five years. Although voters were not asked anything but a question about personnel and no issue of substance was actually their call, the surrounding debates focused on the budget deficit as the decisive factor. Both Tories and Labour agreed that the financial crisis of 2008, the subsequent bank rescue package and the eventual economic downturn caused both public debt and budget deficit to rise to undesirably high levels. The Conservatives opted for tax cuts and austerity measures in order to decrease the deficit; tax cuts to boost the economy and austerity measures to decrease spending. New Labour argued this would kill the upswing and that what was needed was more investment.¹ Quite bluntly both sides put on record that what they care about is 'our' economy and that provision for the subjects of the state has to be subordinated under this goal.² Provision for the people has to be measured by its impact on the economy, rather than measuring the economy by its impact on the provision for the people. Topsy-turvy world.

As usual when public debt is discussed, a parallel was drawn with private debt. The state would have to pay off debt just like a working class family has to pay back a loan.³ Also, references to how poorer countries are suffocated by their debt were made.⁴ However, taking a quick look at one of the many tables comparing total national debt across the globe we find that successful nations such as the USA, the UK and Germany accumulated national debt year by year for decades and hold much more debt in total than any of the poorer countries.⁵ Of course, this fact does not escape economists and they reply that one has to look at the ratio of national debt to GDP.⁶ While this allows new exciting ways to plot numbers over time and to compare charts, it still does not explain how the 'strength' of a national economy relates to national debt and why and when a certain ratio is considered harmful. Why is 90% too much?

The implications of the budget deficit and the public debt reach far beyond the state's ability to pay for its undertakings such as killing peo-

ple in Afghanistan and maintaining the miserable existence of workers in the UK. The public debt weakens the national currency.⁷ Since many groceries etc. are imported from the Eurozone, this drives up prices for many people. Even prices for goods produced in the UK rise; a development well known as inflation.

This article attempts to explain the basic principles behind these phenomena.

Budget

In one (and only one) respect it is fitting to equate personal wallets and state budget. The democratic state uses the same economic means which it imposes on its society: money. Just as it obliges its subjects to use money in order to have access to the things they need and want, the state itself uses it for anything it requires: to provide for its personnel, to enforce the law, to support property and to preserve wage labour. It does not simply expropriate the owners of police batons or command some people to produce traffic signs; instead, it pays for these things and services. Thus, it needs money. The way the state attains money sets it apart from any other subject or legal body: it obtains it by direct appropriation. It makes all its citizens pay taxes (on their income, their trade, their smokes, etc.). States decide their own income, unlike any of their subjects. A working class family cannot decide on a supplementary budget if at the end of the year their resources do not suffice. They have to restrict their needs according to the funds available to them. By contrast, the state decides how much money it 'earns' according to the project it deems necessary. For example, in November 2008 Chancellor Alistair Darling announced his plans to increase taxes for 'top-earners' to help offset the declining revenues during the recession. Comparing the projects it had planned with the available funds – obtained through existing taxes – the government noticed a relevant gap. It decided to increase its funds. The bottom line: the state plans projects it deems necessary and then has the power to raise taxes accordingly.

However, there is a limit to this measure: when

collecting taxes the state is dependent on money earned in its society by its citizens; it is dependent on the ability of some of its citizens to use their money to accumulate it and to pay wages for other citizens, so that the state can collect taxes from their incomes directly and indirectly. In other words, the expropriation it executes contradicts one of the main pillars of its domination: the facilitation of private property. With its guarantee of private property the state establishes the whole market economy in the first place, it provides this economy with money and necessary infrastructure, advances science, fosters development of key industries and maintains a sufficiently skilled working class. All this so that the national economy can prosper. But then the state diminishes the very basis of economic growth by demanding a chunk from the income of the same subjects which it at the same time encourages to accumulate. It undermines the source of its own revenue. This contradiction cannot be avoided and is the basis for perpetual reform efforts. These reforms on the one hand multiply the kinds of taxes and their exceptions in such a way that taxes are raised such that they hinder capitalist growth the least. On the other hand, these reforms perpetually deal with the question of whether expenditures are really necessary for what they are for. For example, is free dental care really necessary to maintain the working class?⁸ The Tories have a few areas of state expenditure in mind which they deem unnecessary relative to their agenda to cut public debt. Any statement about how the budget cannot afford this or that scheme means nothing but that the scheme in question is not deemed pressing enough relative to the estimated burden on the economy and other activities. A state such as the UK is hardly ever actually out of funds.⁹

It makes sure of that by detaching the 'money supply' in society from the money available in society.

Credit money¹⁰

In modern capitalist nations money is 'created' by the state itself. Here, 'creation' is quite fundamental: the state does not content itself

¹"By committing his party to cuts David Cameron's policies would threaten key local services like transportation, police and schools. By doing nothing, they would deepen the downturn and delay the recovery." – http://www.labour.org.uk/vote2009_choice

²One might object that boosting the economy eventually benefits the people. If that was the case then where are the benefits after decades of boosting? Why do people have to work till they drop and have hardly enough to live? A more concise critique can be found in "Private Property, Exclusion and the State" in Kittens #0.

³"Cameron said it was like having credit card debt. 'The longer you leave it, the worse it gets'" – The Guardian, 25. January 2010

⁴"Britain was borrowing more than Greece, whose debt had already sparked the sort of economic crisis that could see soaring interest rates and unemployment if repeated here, he [Cameron] said." – The Guardian, 25. January 2010

⁵cf. <http://buttonwood.economist.com/content/gdc>

⁶GDP is a number in bourgeois economics to measure the economic strength of a national economy. It ostensibly expresses how much value was produced per year in a country.

⁷"Sterling could continue to weaken until 2014, as foreign investors balk at the unprecedented size of the UK's budget deficit." – The Telegraph, 17. October 2009

⁸To both questions – in which form to raise taxes and what to spend them on – there is no *a priori* right answer; only afterwards one can see whether the cutting of a certain scheme was harmful or not. Furthermore, whether a certain scheme is beneficial or not may depend on the point of view. Increased utilisation of solar energy increases independence from oil exporting countries but may harm that part of the national economy which deals in oil. Thus, the questions of how, how much and for what purpose to raise taxes provide endless material for competition among parties.

⁹This is not necessarily the case for most states as discussed in the section "International Reflection".

¹⁰The following avails itself of the article *Der Staatshaushalt* (in German) in GEGENSTANDPUNKT 4-1997. An English translation is available at <http://ruthlesscriticism.com/nationalbudget.htm>.

with minting gold coins nor does it distribute notes which represent a fixed amount of precious metal.¹¹ The amount of notes distributed by the Bank of England is not limited by the size of its gold or dollar hoard, or any hoard at all. Fundamentally, pieces of paper are money because the highest power in society, the state, declares it is; for instance, by collecting taxes in form of these pieces of paper.

For this operation the Bank of England and central banks everywhere build on the services and the 'money creation' provided by the private financial sector, summarised below.¹²

In commerce trusted promises of payment act as means of payment. To give an example: debtor Alice would, instead of paying for a certain trade, issue a bill of exchange;¹³ her creditor Bob would accept it and use it to pay a third party, say, Charly. Alice would sign a piece of paper stating that she, for example, will pay £10 in a week's time. Charly would accept this as means of payment from Bob. Thereby, Bob would pay his bills with a promise of payment by Alice. Of course, this trade is subject to the first debtor Alice actually paying up. The bill of exchange is only temporary and only worth as much as the issuer is able to pay eventually.¹⁴

The whole business with promises of payment becomes somewhat more solid and reliable when the banks are involved, which centralise and monopolise all money in society anyway. Based on this hoard, a bank would convert the bill of exchange into ready cash – for a fee – and Alice now would owe the bank.

Furthermore, the bank provides its customers with credit, money for their endeavours which they did not earn yet. Of course, this service has a price too: interest. For this operation the bank does not even have to draw on its hoard. Its creditors open bank accounts which allows them to subcontract their payment liabilities to the bank; that is, they ask for a money transfer. The bank then clears incoming and outgoing payments and only has to use cash if the difference between outgoing and incoming amounts is negative. If one customer from bank A owes another customer from bank B £1000, while a third customer from bank B owes £800 to a customer at bank A, only £200 need to be transferred from A to B. All movements among account holders of one bank are nothing more than an update in the books of the bank. So if in the previous examples all customers had accounts with the same bank no cash would have to be moved at all.

Back in the day a bank could even satisfy outgoing sums without using hard cash if it issued banknotes: pieces of paper which were

exchangeable for a fixed amount of cash at any time.¹⁵ These banknotes allowed a bank to become more independent from its hoard of cash. Even for outgoing payments it did not have to use it; instead it used promises of payment. These promises of payment were not temporary any more and did not earn interest. They circulate instead of real money.

Of course, this only worked as long as there was trust in the bank, i.e. trust in the bank that its notes were indeed exchangeable for cash and that it did not have to exhaust its hoard to satisfy demand for payment and its usual commitments. When banknotes do not represent 1:1 the actual hoard in the banks but fulfill their duty as credit (and represented money which was yet to be earned by account holders), the course of business has to affirm the money quality of the banknotes. First of all, willing and trusting depositors were required who provided the basis for the credit superstructure, so that the bank could actually exchange its notes for cash. Second, when the bank granted a credit, it treated the promise of payment by the debtor as an asset, almost as good as money and paid the debtor in its banknotes. Say the bank bought Alice's bill of exchange and pays Bob in banknotes. These were backed by Alice's promise to pay the bank. Thus, successful debtors are needed, who turn promises of payment into capitalist wealth and pay interest and whatever initial sum they owe. If Alice defaulted and many other debtors like her, the bank would have become unable to exchange its notes for cash.

The replacement of cash by private banknotes remained temporary. The monetary worth which was represented by these notes was relative and subject to the comparison between different issuers. This led to the situation where notes got a market price and were traded with surcharges and deductions. More dramatically, in a credit crisis or recession every bankrupt bank destroyed the money in the hands of all its customers in one strike. In the most severe situation, the means of payment available for the whole of society would have been reduced to hard cash again, which credit money was meant to replace.

This is where the central bank steps in – for the UK this is the Bank of England, despite its name. With its establishment private banks are prohibited to issue their own banknotes, they are prevented from creating money which they cannot guarantee.¹⁶ On the other hand, they are freed from the limitations of the total social hoard of hard cash, which they centralise and use as basis for their credit business. Their

cash reserves are now notes issued by the central bank, which also allows them to draw additional funds – according to certain rules – when needed. These rules are for example that a certain percentage of what is borrowed has to be deposited with the central bank – so called *collaterals* – plus the interest rates the central bank charges. The notes issued and circulated by the central bank are now fundamentally the social money reserve which the banks turn into advances for capitalist businesses and potentiated social solvency. Their cash reserve and thus their power to create credit is crucially unfettered, since the total social hoard has no hard limit any more.

The issuing by the Bank of England and other central banks is not limited by a hoard in their vaults, by money earned and put on the side. Nor is it limited by the returns of the businesses which are funded with its banknotes. The central bank may treat parts of its operation as private banks would, demanding securities in return for loans to private banks etc. However, its banknotes, with which it buys and lends, are not related at all to some money which someone earned and deposited with it. As long as reserve requirements, interest payments and other rules are followed the amount of money that can be borrowed or 'bought' from the central bank is in principle endless. The 'social hoard', which is 'represented' by the notes of the Bank of England, is nothing but its state-sanctioned mission: its authorisation by state power to issue banknotes.

The money function of these pieces of paper is thus not relative as with private banks and does not depend on the central bank's solvency; the Bank of England is always solvent. Instead the difference between a banknote and money is erased by law in general: now banknotes *are* money. The units which are printed on banknotes are valid measures of social wealth, the standard of all incomes and prices, just like units of weights of precious metals used to be. These banknotes do not represent, they *are* cash. By monopolising the credit business the central bank completes it and turns it upside down: it *creates* the money, which on the contrary in society must be *earned*. Out of thin air the states creates the material it obliges all its subjects to earn.

The accomplishment of giving pieces of paper cash quality requires a binding grip on society. The presses of the central banks not only replace whole goldmines but also the toil of mining and processing their products. They create the substance of the wealth of nations in its abstract and adequate form. The value printed on

¹¹“The words ‘I promise to pay the bearer on demand the sum of five [ten/twenty/fifty] pounds’ date from long ago when our notes represented deposits of gold. At that time, a member of the public could exchange one of our banknotes for gold to the same value. For example, a £5 note could be exchanged for five gold coins, called sovereigns. But the value of the pound has not been linked to gold for many years, so the meaning of the promise to pay has changed. Exchange into gold is no longer possible and Bank of England notes can only be exchanged for other Bank of England notes of the same face value.” – <http://www.bankofengland.co.uk/banknotes/about/faqs.html>

¹²More details can be found in the articles “Financial Crisis 2008ff” and “Surface Tension” in kittens #0 available at <http://www.junge-linke.org/en>.

¹³Bills of exchange have mostly been replaced by modern credit these days.

¹⁴This process is discussed in detail in Chapter 3 of *Capital* Vol.1 by Karl Marx.

¹⁵In 1844 the Bank of England was granted the sole issuing right for banknotes.

¹⁶There are actually a few private banks in Scotland and Wales which still have the right to issue Sterling notes. These notes have to be backed 1:1 by Bank of England notes though.

¹⁷Besides collecting taxes in pound sterling, in England and Wales this guarantee means that a debtor who pays debt obligations in Bank of England notes cannot be sued for non-payment. That is, when settling a debt Bank of England notes must be accepted, they are “legal tender”. In Scotland and Northern Ireland no legal tender exists. In some countries such as Germany the state demands that transactions are priced and executed in the local currency, making the European Central Bank money without alternative by decree.

banknotes has its substance in its guarantee by the highest power in society.¹⁷ This substance is founded in a relationship of power which the complete national economy is subordinated to without exception. On the other hand, this way the state subjects its money and its guarantee, backed by all its power, to the market.

Money supply

Yet just printing money is not all that needs to be done by central banks. Their money becomes the cash of the society by being used by private banks to finance their business. Thereby it is put into circulation – the prerequisite for its use in society. Private banks ‘buy’ this money using financial assets¹⁸ or borrow it from the central bank. Then they distribute this money and credit created on top of it by lending it out to their customers (and each other) – for a price: interest. This shows that the ‘money supply’ which the state monopolised and centralised with its central bank has a prerequisite and a public duty. Its use must be lucrative: lucrative for the banks which have to pay interest or assets for it and for their customers who in turn pay interest to the banks for their credit. All cash in society comes into existence through a credit business which starts from the ‘bank of banks’, the ‘lender of last resort’, and demands a utilisation which is compatible with this credit business.

By providing loan funds, which are cash themselves and thus independent of an external hoard, the state fuels the credit business. It does so with the stipulation that this fosters all other parts of the economy.¹⁹

The fact that the central bank applies strict rules – interest rates²⁰, reserve requirements²¹, etc. – to private banks’ access to its money is consistent with this stipulation: these conditions express the fact that cash provided by the state freed the credit business from the limitation of a finite money supply in society.

The control which the state exercises with these rules practically enforces the demand which is put forward by each banknote issued: the business financed using this money must be lucrative, in such a way that the claimed value is produced and thus confirmed. This demand is not different from the normal demand attached to private credit money, but this time the demand is made towards the complete economy

by the state. The value of its loan funds does not depend on a realisation in cash any more, contrary to privately created means of payment. This does not diminish the demand however; the value, which is ‘represented’ by legal tender, still has to be produced by successful business endeavours. The political assertion must be redeemed by actual accumulation. In other words, by creating money the state claims that goods and services can be purchased with this money; capitalist accumulation has to produce these goods and services.

By issuing notes with a face value and thus positing the equation of advance and cash, the state subjects these notes to doubt as to whether the equation will hold. The state’s decree does not cancel out the capitalist fact that only produced and profitably realised exchange value is real social wealth, and that the kind of social wealth that counts is the social power of access to wealth in society: control over land, material, technology and people. The decree is not meant to strike through this fact: the state demands from its society that it approves its provisions by capitalist accumulation. It holds its businesses and working attachments responsible for producing the abstract wealth which the central bank notes and the credit created on top of them claim to have realised already. The claim of the notes is ‘soft’, because credit and money are only *claimed* to be identical, the national economy is under the stipulation to prove it ‘hard’ by producing the claimed identity. They have to produce the wealth these notes command.

If this process is not successful then an increased amount of money confronts an amount of commodities which did not increase accordingly. The availability of ready cash will be used by capitalists to demand higher prices; a process a.k.a. inflation. In a nutshell, the more money was created relative to the actually produced value, the stronger the inflation.²²

Through their credit money states created the inherent necessity for permanent growth, which is used so often to justify any austerity measure, job or wage cut. Because if accumulation does not meet expectations, not only is a particular company endangered in a way that would work to some other company’s advantage, but all money and a national economy dependent on it is at stake.²³

While this explains the possibility of inflation, it does not explain its ubiquity.

Inflation

The central bank has no incentive to inject additional funds into society except to maintain the ‘money supply’. The central bank creates money to stimulate the economy, not to buy tanks or mansions.²⁴ Thus it would seem as if any inflation could be attributed to either its failure to predict growth correctly, to its inability to restrict private credit creation or to a calculated move.²⁵

However, unwanted inflation is so commonplace and such a source of worry also because of the way modern capitalist nation-states exploit their sovereignty over the national money to get into debt themselves, without even printing a banknote to offset their deficit. The technical process is usually that states offer *bonds* for auction to private investors and other states, which earn interest for some number of years; and every such credit the state blesses itself with, becomes an act of money creation.

- Every issued bond arrives – through the private banking system – as an interest bearing capital investment in the business cycle; these bonds have the same security as money, after all they are guaranteed by the same party, but in addition they also bear interest. Thus the financial world uses them – at least when they are near their redemption date – like money.
- Every pound sterling the state uses to pay in an orderly way for services received also arrives as increased means of payment in the economy. Every copper, welfare recipient and builder contracted by the state who spends his salary on groceries injects new money into society.
- Central banks accept state issued bonds as securities when private banks borrow money and as payment when they ‘buy’ it; thus based on state issued bonds more credit can be created.

The control exercised by the state over the ‘money supply’ for private banks reflects the fact that it freed them from the money already earned in society. At the same time, the state creates new money itself, exploiting the fact that it is free from the money already earned in society.

This practice continuously converts state debt into socially valid means of payment; in this

¹⁸This process is called ‘quantitative easing’. The central bank buys financial assets, including government and corporate bonds, from financial institutions using money it has ‘created’.

¹⁹‘The Bank’s monetary policy objective is to deliver price stability – low inflation – and, subject to that, to support the Government’s economic objectives including those for growth and employment.’ – <http://www.bankofengland.co.uk/monetarypolicy/framework.htm>

²⁰Its interest rate regulates how much money is demanded, simply by adjusting the price of borrowing money. Higher interest rates imply that some businesses are simply not lucrative enough to borrow money for. Also, private banks will usually borrow to each other with an interest rate close to the one set by the central bank; there is no point borrowing from a private bank if it offers worse conditions than the central bank.

²¹The central bank demands a certain size of reserve funds that banks need to keep when creating money through credit. In its basic form this works as follows. Say, the required reserve ratio is 20% and the central bank lends a private bank A £1,000. This bank now has to hold on to £200 and can credit some bank B £800. This bank in turn has to hold on to £160 and lends the remaining £540 to some bank D etc. On the other hand, the central bank allows other assets such as bonds – especially those issued by the state – to be used as reserve funds and thus this simplified calculation does not apply as such.

²²This process might be somewhat more mediated. For instance, if the increased solvency is almost exclusively used to buy financial assets, it might not make itself felt immediately.

²³To avoid a potential source of misunderstanding: when we write that states increase the stakes this way no partisanship for sustainable, less risky capitalist growth is implied. These state actions do not conflict with what they aim to achieve – a powerful state and a strong national economy – and it is this aim we resent.

²⁴Making sure that any exterior incentives stay out of the central bank’s core business is the reason why central banks are often somewhat removed from the direct grip of the government.

²⁵The Bank of England considers 2% inflation per year adequate: ‘The inflation target of 2% is expressed in terms of an annual rate of inflation based on the Consumer Prices Index (CPI). The remit is not to achieve the lowest possible inflation rate. Inflation below the target of 2% is judged to be just as bad as inflation above the target.’ (<http://is.gd/7rsVq>) Short of any concrete things which are badly needed – which would be encouragement enough – the state demands investment for growth, nothing but growth for the sake of growth.

way the money supply increases and thus the same immense but not necessarily increased collection of commodities is confronted by an increased purchasing power; all this is of course well known. And these are reasons for general concern: thus the current debates about the deficit and how to cut it. By taking credit the state frees itself from the currently available money in society, but only to subject itself much more strongly to the success of its economy; it must grow in order to fulfil the promise made by credit money that it represents power of access to social wealth.

International reflection

The contradiction between the claimed identity of cash and credit and their actual non-identity, which is immanent in national banknotes, becomes immediately evident when legal tender is confronted with a similar alternative; as soon as banknotes are equated in quality and compared in quantity with banknotes of other countries.²⁶ Currencies get a market value in some other currency, which measures the relationship between money supply and economic development among competing nations. What the state prevents within its borders by monopolising the right to issue notes is confronted on a higher level between states. Credit moneys compete against each other to be worth as much as they claim.

The recognition of a currency based on decree only reaches as far as the grip of the state. Towards foreign public and private investors the state has to make its money palatable through economic means instead of decree. The acceptance of national banknotes is based on the state's establishment of an economic interest with foreign investors.

First of all, this requires a national hoard. International commerce needs to be assured that the national currency is exchangeable into something which allows worldwide business. This used to be gold, but these days it usually is either US dollar, euros or British pound sterling. For example, in order for the German mark to rise as a strong currency, dollars were needed which required successful exports. If this succeeds, then trust in the currency is established which detaches itself from direct trade. Foreign states and banks accepted German marks but did not necessarily want to conduct business in Germany nor did they want to exchange these German marks into US dollars. Instead, they kept the currency as a basis for their own creditworthiness; they hoarded German marks as a guarantee for it. This way the German mark did

not need to prove any more that it represented real value or that it could initiate accumulation of wealth. As hoard it received acceptance that it was immediately world money, a quality it handed down to the euro.²⁷

International commodity and money transactions which had nothing to do with Germany at all were increasingly conducted in German marks. Similarly, the pound is the world's third largest reserve currency and today the trade of oil is almost all done using US dollars; this way the oil trade – a truly ubiquitous commodity – also confirms dollar as world money. But also the financial sphere with its commercial banks, investment banks, insurance companies and hedge funds creates new fields in which a currency can receive acceptance by being treated as a safe and lucrative investment opportunity.

If currency is not returned to the issuing state and state bonds stay in demand, because states and companies trust them and want to hold on to them, then the financial sovereignty of a state increases also outside of its borders. For example, Germany in the early 1990s contracted 1,000 billion German marks in debt to finance the incorporation of the GDR and this did not harm the international reputation of German marks as world money. The US fund their war on terror using credit and still control the world money. On the contrary, the fact that they get to contract massive debts without much harm underlines their position as keeper of world money. A currency which only buys assets within the borders of its issuing state is dependent on the economy in these borders to produce these assets. A currency which buys commodities worldwide is more independent of these borders, since foreign companies produce assets which can be bought with this money. In other words, the collection of commodities which a currency confronts is bigger than the national product.²⁸

This use of a currency is available for only the few most successful states. If the vast majority of states contract debts, they burden their currency. Private and public investors from abroad do not consider the increased availability of these currencies as a welcomed supply of world money, but as an increase of slips which makes the already circulating slips less valuable. These kind of states have to offer higher interest rates in order to sell their bonds and have to contract debts in foreign currency. In this case they need to export successfully, yet not in order to increase their national hoard but to service their debt and pay interest in foreign currency.

Nation-states which have to service their debt in foreign currency have a severe disadvantage. The creditworthiness of, for example, Mexico in the 1990s was doubted. It had to use its foreign currency reserves to service debt instead using it as national hoard. Its national currency was not considered a secure haven for value, other central banks did not add them to their national hoard. Whoever owned those pieces of paper was quick to exchange them for dollars, German marks and pounds sterling. Mexico's central bank thus had to buy pesos with dollars to maintain some trust in its currency: dollars which were needed by the state to service its debt. Thus, foreign currency is needed by both the state and its central bank.

The success of some nation-states in turning their own currencies into world money produced many nation-states on the other hand which are permanently servicing debt. The citizens of these nation-states are subjected to more work and less pay in order to service these debts. After all, these debts are at least partly serviced using the state's revenue source: taxes, which first must be earned. Subjects are negatively dependent on their economy. While the "wealth of nations" is anything but the wealth of its working class, the poverty of a nation ensures poverty for the majority of its citizens.

Back to budget

The ongoing debate about the size of public debt and the budget deficit has its basis in the programme to maintain the positive international reputation of the pound and the British state.

The British state needs third parties *willing* to buy its bonds in order to service its debt and to deal with its budget deficit. Now taxes, the actual income which it collects from society, are used to fund the credibility of old and new debt. Besides financing the state's undertakings, taxes are used to service debt. The main purpose of cutting the deficit is to persuade investors at home and abroad to grant further credit in the future.²⁹ States very rarely actually cut their principal debt or even eliminate their budget deficit, what they cut – if they cut – is the amount of new debt generated annually. Furthermore, the British economy is dependent on the international *recognition* of the pound and a steady, low inflation. The state, in turn, utilises the strength of its national economy as a *signal* for its own creditworthiness.

Thus, there is no rational *a priori* answer to how much public debt is too much.

²⁶This is not as self-evident as it might seem at first. Sure, money performs almost the same functions around the globe. However, the fact that states allow their own currency to be exchanged and compared against other currencies is a political decision. China for example limits the flow of yuan out of the motherland.

²⁷A lot of the financial superstructure of the eurozone is based on the German version. The European Central Bank is modelled on the German Bundesbank; the Maastricht criteria which demand that the annual government deficit may not exceed 3% of the GDP and that total government debt may not exceed 60% were copied 1:1 from German law. Nothing about these decisions is scientific, Germany's success had to suffice as proof for their correctness.

²⁸This does not imply however, that the US can simply go into debt and hold the whole world responsible for creating the wealth matching its US dollars. They still have to service their debts without interruption and on time which only works if the financial markets have no doubt in this capability and provide the necessary credit to service old debt. The strength of the national economy and the derived possibility of the USA to service debt using taxes is one of the signals which the financial markets use for their speculation.

²⁹"Moody's, the international credit rating agency, warned today that it could cut the UK's coveted credit rating if Britain fails to sort out its fiscal deficit within the next three years. While there is no immediate threat to the UK's gold-plated AAA rating, if the country is unable to finance its debts and keep interest rates under control, it could face a downgrade by 2013, Moody's said." – <http://business.timesonline.co.uk/tol/business/article6952814.ece>

On Hans-Georg Backhaus' dialectic of the value-form

The following text is based on a contribution to a Capital reading group. As such, it has many premises, among them that the reader has a rough idea what Hans-Georg Backhaus' book Dialektik der Wertform. Untersuchungen zur Marxschen Ökonomiekritik (Freiburg, 1997) is about. Since the book is not available in English, it is unlikely that this premise is met. However, since there seems to be a renewed interest in the New Marx Reading¹, which the critique applies to in more generality, and we had the choice to either print this, a page with pictures of kittens or an empty page, we chose to publish it hoping it might be useful.

After the slackening of the student movement in Germany it split roughly in two parts. A bigger part engaged in activism and Marxism-Leninism and founded various K-groups and communist parties, a smaller part attempted an appropriation and reconstruction of Marx' critique of political economy.

The writings of Hans-Georg Backhaus (and of Hans-Jürgen Krahl and Helmut Reichelt) are among the most well-known of the publications from the area of this movement. They are still considered today by parts of the (academic) Left. Whether Backhaus' thoughts can rightfully be called "the best by far", as the Ça Ira publisher claims on the blurb, may at least be doubted, since he repeats the same fundamental mistakes which characterised the whole reconstruction-movement. That is, such mistakes which occur if one wants to exercise:

Marxism as Methodology

Backhaus is like many authors from the 1970s: instead of investigating what Marx found out about capitalism and what he criticised about it, he wants to extract the right method for social critique. He is less interested in the *value-form* analysis but more in the *value-form analysis*.

The starting point for his deliberations on the value-form analysis is the simple fact that Marx wrote it down in several versions. Furthermore, Backhaus cites passages by Marx in which he mentions that he was flirting with Hegel's ex-

pressions, that studying Hegel helped him when writing Capital and that he hid his method in every new version of the value-form analysis a little further. Finally, Backhaus references Lenin who claimed one had to understand Hegel completely in order to understand Marx.

Backhaus takes all this in order to critically check the last published version of the value-form analysis (2nd edition and the following) and spots several defects. Backhaus mainly criticises that one cannot understand the deduction of value as a dialectical movement any more. More precisely, he criticises that one cannot understand the transition from the second to the third sub-chapter (that is from the dual character of the labour embodied in commodities to the value-form or exchange-value) as an expression of the method "rising from the abstract to the concrete". The development exchange value – value – value-form is supposedly not comprehensible as dialectical movement from the immediate being through the essence to the mediated existence. That insofar as the immediacy is sublated² and posited again as mediated existence.

As one can see, Backhaus has standards for a transition which he took from Hegel and which he sees violated in Marx. We recall: After the deduction from exchange-value to value, Marx considers initially its substance – namely the dual character of the labour embodied in commodities – and then returns the level of appearance: "The progress of the investigation will lead us back to exchange-value as the necessary mode of expression, or form of appearance of value. For the present, however, we must consider the nature of value independently of its form of appearance" (Karl Marx, *Capital* Vol.1, p.128) "However, let us remember that commodities possess an objective character as values only in so far as they are all expressions of an identical social substance, human labour, that their objective character as values is therefore purely social. From this it follows self-evidently that it can only appear in the social relation between commodity and commodity. In fact, we started from exchange-value, or the exchange relation of commodities, in order to track down the value that lay hidden within it.

We must now return to this form of appearance of value." (Karl Marx, *Capital* Vol.1, p.138-139, our emphasis) Marx clearly expresses the necessity of the progress here: from the argumentation so far in Capital it became plain, that the body of commodities contains a social relation which on its own it cannot represent, but *only* in relationship with another object which is part of the same social relation – another commodity.

For Backhaus this dialectic of the object, i.e. the commodity itself, is apparently not enough. His project is the dialectic, whose movement and transitions are fixed and known well before any consideration of an object – in this case the elementary form of wealth in capitalist societies. Independent from the laws governing an object, someone engaged in science and critique has to follow a method which is allegedly suitable to recover findings from an object: That is, Marx' dialectical method of development and the rise from abstract to concrete. Unfortunately, Marx never wrote down this method and also did not always follow it. Thus one would need to recover it from the critique of political economy in order to finally understand this critique properly ... This brings about a most beautiful circular argument: without knowing his method Marx cannot be understood, in order to learn this method one has to engage with his scientific findings and understand them, which is not possible since one does not know the method, which one thus has to learn etc. In his better passages Backhaus recognises this dilemma but when exercising his reconstruction he falls behind this banal insight.

That is the whole mistake of the transubstantiation of Marxism into a theory of methodology: one wants to be certain of the accuracy and correctness of a science and its results before studying it. This brings about a strange relation to Marx and his work. On the one hand, the good man is praised as methodological saint, whose approach – about which one does not know anything precise until today – is the only correct and who is the only one who got it right. On the other hand, doubt is spread about his insights because the author did not follow his own method all the time.

¹cf. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_Marx_Reading

²In German: 'aufheben'. It means (a) to lift, (b) to abolish and (c) to preserve.

About this journal

Critique's failure does not usually derive from peoples' inability to see the misery around them; work, unemployment, war, hunger, genocide, toxic waste, sexism, drowning refugees, homophobia, stress, to name but a few. Everybody knows and almost everybody resents these facts. However, as quickly as most people offer pity, they offer wrong explanations why these facts keep surfacing in the 'most human of all societies'.

We claim that modern misery is the ultimate result of capitalism and the nation state. The purpose of this journal is to prove this claim by explaining manifestations such as those listed above. We therefore criticise many other theories about the conditions we are forced to live under, as wrong. The purpose of this journal is to criticise those conditions which ensure that wine and cheese are not available to everyone and to criticise everyone who justifies this. Luxury for everyone!

The Wine and Cheese Appreciation Society of Greater London is the rather small group behind this journal. We are not in the business of being the vanguard of the working class nor are we self-sufficient intellectuals writing about Marx behind closed doors. We want to criticise, discuss, engage, argue. We do not believe that insight follows from one's social position in

a positive (Autonomia) or negative (Marxism-Leninism) way. Arguments do not have a standpoint, they are either correct or wrong, insufficient, incomplete.

Since we refer to Marx quite a bit, a few clarifications. Capitalism does not vanish by itself. Its crises are nothing but crises of its valorisation. On the other hand, the fact that it breaks people and causes them harm is an inevitable part of its package in crisis and in boom. Modern democracies, where politicians care about nothing except the well-being of the country, are the adequate form of government for the capitalist mode of production. The emancipation of politics from capitalist enterprises is a necessary condition for the existence of capitalist relations. Nation states are not players on the market, they make markets possible. We have nothing positive to say about sociological Marxism with all its classes, strata and social groups, with its 'power relations' and 'objectively progressive interests', which allegedly give rise to the right strategy. We do not follow the wide-spread 'realism' which consists of doing stuff one does not want and to not talk about the stuff one actually does want. The lesser of two evils is still an evil. We do not want to be successful with something, but with a rather particular critique. We do not understand the

Soviet union as 'state capitalism' nor do we think the 'experiment' started out alright but went wrong on the way. We do not follow the cult of the working class nor any other Leninist-Stalinist-Maoist nonsense. Declarations of love towards the workers, 'the people' and 'the little man' are absent from our texts since this prevents a proper critique of their wrong consciousness. This critique is necessary because it is them who will have to move in order for anything to change. The kind of anti-capitalism, which suspects evil parasites behind everything and conspiracies everywhere, will not be found in our texts; however, arguments against this rubbish will be.

Though our published results and conclusions might be misinterpreted as dogmatic we do not claim at all to have monopolised the truth. On the contrary: This journal is an invitation to critique. Every verdict based on scientific criticism we welcome.

Our group is part of the network 'Junge Linke gegen Kapital und Nation'. This journal contains both articles produced by us and translations of texts by other groups in this network. If you want to discuss articles published in this journal, just get in touch at

wineandcheese@hush.com or

<http://www.junge-linke.org/en>.

