

%attac declaration 2010

Attac Österreich
Margaretenstraße 166
1050 Wien
Fon +43.1.5440010
Fax +43.1.5440059
Web attac.at
Email infos@attac.at

Creating another world – enabling a “good life” for all

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I A backward glance

Since its foundation in 2000 Attac has put forward concrete proposals for a different, more just world, and has contributed to a better understanding of the global economy - in opposition to the supposed lack of alternatives to neo-liberal globalisation. We have successfully exposed the negative consequences of de-regulated financial markets, neo-liberal trade policies and the privatisation of public services and have also clarified the roles, powers and vested interests of those who profit thereof. Our suggestions for democratic control of the financial markets – in particular a tax on financial transactions – are now being discussed and demanded throughout the world.

However, in view of the fact that the negative effects of the present economic system are becoming increasingly visible, it is not enough to deal with individual problems in isolation. More than ever, we are being faced by the challenge of questioning this entire system and finding new answers.

II The current economic system – the cause of a multitude of crises

The current manner in which goods are produced, provides access to a hitherto unprecedented wealth of goods and services, which could fulfil the needs of everyone. But in fact, ever greater numbers of people are being exploited and excluded from satisfying their basic needs and the environment is being destroyed. Attac already pointed out many problems of our economic system in 2000. Since then, these have become even more serious: about a billion people go hungry, the gap between rich and poor is growing both in the South and the North, climate change is causing an increase in extreme climate events (forest fires, floods, storms, drought etc.) and there is a decrease in natural resources and biodiversity. Wealth and resources are becoming more and more unequally distributed, which leads to a growing concentration of economic and political power in the hands of a small (economic) elite.

All this is the result and the expression of an economic system which is focused on the maximisation of personal profit and which is built on the dogma of limitless growth and the apparently unlimited availability of resources. Today, almost all parts of society are subject to this logic.

This situation should force the decision-makers to make a fundamental change to their policies. What we are witnessing now, however, is “business as usual”. Democratically elected representatives continue to take decisions which primarily serve the interests of those who own and run our economies, rather than the public good. The power of the economic elite and its increasing interlacing with the political elite, is leading to an extensive breakdown of democracy. There is less and less democratic participation in important decisions; instead, they are outsourced to “experts” or “advisory bodies”. In view of these power relationships it is naïve to trust politicians to use the powers granted them temporarily to pass laws and regulations which do not conform to the logic of profit and growth. We are faced with the challenge of dealing with the role of the state and democracy, and the re-claiming of our decision-making powers.

III Our aims for the next few years

If we agree that all people have the right to a “good life”, then “business as usual” is not an option. We need to re-shape entirely how, for whom and why we produce and how we consume. Also we should follow aims and principles which serve the common good from a social, ecological and democratic point of view.

Aims which serve society as a whole

The central aim of our work is to enable everybody to have a good life – now and in the future. A “good life for all” means for us specifically:

- Respect for the dignity of each person, satisfaction of basic human needs and the fostering of individual development.
- Ecologically sustainable use of natural resources (soil, water, plants, minerals etc.) and their just distribution in the interests of the global public good, taking into consideration the vital interests and survival of future generations.
- Joint decision-making about what is produced, for whom, and in what form; how public goods are used and preserved, and how the parameters for this are created. Empowerment of people to shape their lives themselves.

A good life for all presupposes that the basics for survival are secured.

Principles of economic activity

In order to achieve these aims, forms of economic activity need to be organised according to the following principles:

- **Social justice and ecological sustainability:** The wealth of society is to be produced and distributed in a socially just and ecologically sustainable way, thus guaranteeing social security for everybody. The focus of economic activity is based on the principles of providing goods and services needed and a care economy.
- **Just division of labour:** Work is to be justly distributed, evaluated and esteemed, and linked to the creation of these goods and services which are necessary for society. People are to decide for themselves on how to spend their lifetime.

- **Democratic organisation:** Decisions about economic parameters and rules are made involving all groups of society. Differences in power between individuals, genders, classes, ethnic groups and regions resulting in unjust distribution of opportunities must be eliminated.
- **Orientation towards the common good:** The aim of economic activities is the greatest possible common good – locally as well as globally. Cooperation, solidarity and responsibility are the principles which direct all action.

IV PATHS TO FUNDAMENTAL CHANGE towards a good life for everyone

Many people all over the world are already implementing socially just and ecologically sustainable forms of economic activity at a local level. At the same time, they are struggling at a regional, national or global level for a political framework which will support this. **The goal is not to replace one economic model with another one, which is to be applied throughout the world and in all areas of society. Mechanistic, unique solutions are not possible and would not lead to the desired result.** We must develop forms of economic activity which are holistic, and appropriate for the respective local, social and environmental conditions; we must understand and respect diversity as a strength, and nature as the basis of all life. This demands re-thinking and alteration of our lifestyles. We would like to pursue the search for other forms of economic activity by looking at different paths to change. We will call these **“transformation paths”**. These are both a continuation and a development of the topics which we have been working on since our inception. With these **“transformation paths”**, we are also taking up new topics and combining a comprehensive analysis of the present economic system with the development of alternatives.

TRANSFORMATION PATH a financial system oriented towards the common good

Financial markets, in their neo-liberal form, are to a great degree responsible for our current economic and social crisis. They do not serve an economy and society which is oriented towards the common good and democracy.

We counter this with the concept a financial system oriented towards the common good: In the short term, casino capitalism has to be ended through comprehensive re-regulation at national, European and global levels; the power of the financial sector and the wealthy elite has to be broken. The first important steps in that direction include breaking up these allegedly essential banks which “must not be allowed to fail”, the closing of tax havens, stricter rules for equity capital and accounting, an authorisation requirement for “financial products”, the introduction of a tax on financial transactions and a more just distribution of society’s wealth through taxation of property and unearned income.

In the long term an alternative financial system is necessary – one with a democratic banking system which is not oriented towards profit but towards the common good. Loans will be granted according to social, environmental and democratic criteria, in order to fund sustainable projects. Essential social functions – such as care for the elderly, or the pricing of commodities or exchange rates – will be organised outside the financial markets.

TRANSFORMATION PATH “Glocalisation” of the economy

Our present economic system is based on “cheap” energy (especially oil) and the related low transport costs, and on the exploitation of “competitive advantages”. More and more products and services are being produced or provided where companies can cut cost through lower wages and environmental or social standards, thus maximising their profits. On the other hand, they are sold in places where there are higher incomes, greater wealth, or access to consumer credit.

We counter this with the concept of “glocalisation”: The core of this idea is an economy based on short distances. Goods and services which can be produced and used locally should also be provided locally. Regional economic processes will thus be strengthened. Goods needing larger units of production (e.g. manufacture of trains or rails) should be organised on a continental level for reasons of efficiency. Some goods and services will continue to be traded globally, based on the principles of solidarity and subsidiarity. In order to achieve a short-distances economy, we need among other things prices reflecting

the true environmental and social costs, and fair global trade and investment rules which are oriented towards human rights and their implementation.

TRANSFORMATION PATH **“Food Sovereignty”**

The industrialization of agriculture and foodstuff production, and the promotion of a global agriculture market by free-trade agreements (such as the WTO Agriculture Agreement) are major causes of ruined family farms, overexploited natural resources, huge market and power concentrations in the hands of a few agriculture, food, and retailing corporations, as well as of more than a billion people going hungry.

We counter this with the concept of food sovereignty: Food sovereignty is based on the human right to food. It includes the right of people to determine food and agricultural policies, and thus the manner of production, distribution, and consumption of food themselves. Food sovereignty is a decentralized concept. It allows a wide variety of food and agricultural systems adapted to regional and local conditions. Its goal is an agriculture which guarantees access for all to healthy, affordable food produced in an ecologically sustainable manner, and assures a fair income to producers of food as well as the livelihoods of future generations. Family and organic farming, as well as local and regional (continental) trade in food play a central role in this, and have priority over exports and world trade.

TRANSFORMATION PATH **“Energy Sovereignty”**

Today, the satisfaction of our fundamental needs depends on fossil fuels. Their absence would lead to the collapse of many fields of business and life within a few days. In particular, prosperity in the global North is based on the exploitation and utilization of the energy resources of the countries of the global South. As a result, energy consumption (and CO₂ emissions), and thus prosperity, are distributed extremely unequally in the world.

We counter this with the concept of energy sovereignty. Energy sovereignty means the right of people to exercise control over the production and distribution of energy. Access to affordable sources of energy is a fundamental human right. An ecologically sustainable and socially just supply of energy therefore requires not only massive pu-

blic investment, but also decentralization and democratization of distribution structures. The democratization of research and knowledge production, as well as the establishment of autonomous networks for social-ecological innovation, are also imperative. The foreseeable end to the availability of fossil fuels, and climate change, make it imperative to give up fossil fuels as a source of energy. In order to make a good life for everybody possible with renewable sources of energy, the way in which we run our economy needs to be re-organized.

TRANSFORMATION PATH **“Commons” – using collectively what belongs to us all**

In recent decades, more and more areas such as postal services, telecommunications, railways, power utilities, etc., which used to be organized as public services, have been subjected to the logic of the market by means of “liberalization” and privatization. Knowledge is also being privatized – for example, by global treaties on patents. States and big businesses are acquiring large amounts of land, especially in the countries of the global South (“land-grabbing”). This deprives people of their basic requirements, degrades their quality of life, and reduces their opportunities for participation.

We counter this with the concept of the commons: “Commons” means that we share vital resources and use them collectively. Natural, social, and cultural commons (such as water, raw materials, land, and knowledge) are a precondition for every functioning society. The goal is to define public services as “commons”, as well. Commons always comprise three components: the respective resources, the corresponding group of users (for some commons, such as the climate, this is the entire human race), and the rules which the users develop and monitor themselves. This gives people the possibility of taking areas of their lives into their own hands. Commons permit self-determination and personal development, as well as cooperation and mutual respect. They contribute to empowerment – in particular of socially disadvantaged people.

In a commons-based society, ownership entitles one to use resources, but not to exclude others from doing so. Natural resources are not overexploited, and cultural and social commons are cared for so that they are not lost. Economic activity is organized so that everybody contributes to the production of what we need according to their abilities. Thus commons allow alternatives to a growth economy.

TRANSFORMATION PATH

“Work based on human dignity”

The labour of many generations of women and men throughout the world forms the basis of our knowledge, prosperity, and material riches. Their unequal and unjust distribution by sex and social and ethnic origins in and between regions was and is implemented and maintained – globally and locally – by political and economic power. More than half of all hours worked remain unpaid. The majority of this unpaid work is done by women; it is indispensable for the functioning of our society. Paid work for a living wage, on the other hand, is available to fewer and fewer people. In a market economy oriented to competition and profit, it is traded as a commodity, and regarded as a cost factor; wages and labour standards come under pressure.

We counter this with the goal of work based on human dignity: Work based on human dignity presupposes a new view of human existence and a different kind of economy: phases of education and training, of care work, of waged work, of political work, of leisure, and of creative existence are equally important, and must be made possible for all people.

Who works on what and under what conditions must be determined by people’s needs – for example the need for fulfilling, self-determined and community-determined work that secures living wage. Another essential aspect is democratic participation in the decision over how the wealth produced is used. Alternative options of ensuring peoples existence – which are decoupled from wage work – include commons or an unconditional basic income.

TRANSFORMATION PATH

“Comprehensive Democratization”

The possibilities for democratic participation in decision-making have been reduced considerably in recent decades. Decisions on economic policy, for example, are increasingly made at levels far removed from many people’s potential influence at a supranational level (EU, UN, WTO). Political and economic elites are more and more closely intermeshed. The result is that many people reduce democracy to merely voting for parties or professional politicians, or waive their right to vote entirely.

We counter this with the concept of comprehensive democratization: Comprehensive democratization means

that everybody, and not just elites, is involved in all matters of public interest and helps to decide: how should the wealth be divided? How are vital resources utilized? What should be produced to ensure that those goods and services are provided increase the common wealth, while at the same time maintaining the basis for our life over the long term? We are looking for and promoting new forms of democratic organization of all fields of life. This includes participation in decision-making in alternative forms of housing, in school, or at the workplace, just as much as in public tasks and services such as the organization of traffic, urban planning, welfare legislation, or the public budget. New democratic forms are also need for decisions that can only be made at the global level (e.g. climate change).

V Strategies for another world – shaping politics and living alternatives

Since our organization was founded, we have gained a lot of political experience. We base our strategies on it, and are constantly refining them. Central to us is the combination of political action with the implementation of concrete alternatives.

We inform about economic relationships, and create spaces for reflection and discussion, in order to empower people to become active themselves (economic literacy campaigns).

We develop concrete political alternatives, and present them actively to the public, in order to demonstrate the possibility of another world.

We network with civil-society action groups in Austria, Europe, and at the global level, in order to promote joint political demands by means of campaigns and mobilizations.

We support and actively participate in citizens' groups which are actively shaping and living another world, mainly at the local level.

Translation: Barbara Forbes and Timothy Slater, Coorditrad