

Under Pressure – Crises. Struggles. Transformations. BUKO-Congress, 17.-20th. May in Erfurt/Germany

Mounting pressure: Crises

One crisis haunts the other: Housing bubbles burst. Big banks go bankrupt. Debt escalates. The Euro tumbles. Whole states face insolvency. Billions flow into bailout funds. Further billions flow into bailouts for bailout funds. "Save yourself if you can" – that is the creed and whoever cannot do it on their own is left out in the rain.

The crisis has many faces and cannot only be reduced to a financial or economic crisis. It is also a climate and resource crisis. The capitalist mode of production is based on exploitation of people and nature. That's nothing new. New though is the brutality used to squeeze the last drop out of the lemon. The imperial lifestyle in the Global North is based on ever increasing consumption of goods as well as on the massive use of fossil fuels like coal and oil. Just as resource consumption is peaking and demand is remaining high – even accelerating – prices are rising. Thus extreme forms of energy extraction become viable in ever more remote locations. The accompanied destruction of whole landscapes and regions, especially in the Global South, is a price "willingly paid".

The current crisis is also a distributional one. Especially at the Horn of Africa more and more people face starvation. Climatic changes have resulted in water shortages, droughts and crop failure. Due to financial speculation the price for food crops has skyrocketed to such levels that food imports become unaffordable and people starve to death – more than 13 million people in East Africa are on the brink of starvation. Land grabbing and the depletion of agricultural land for the agro-fuel business undermine the basis for food security: Maize is grown for the production of bio-fuels for the Global North, instead of warranting the needs of the starving local population. As goods and access to these goods are becoming scarce, distribution wars are on the rise. Export interests and free access to resources prevail over humanitarian interests.

The mantra-like response to these multi-layered crises is "Growth – at any cost!" If one market diminishes another has to grow: so at one time it is food crops that are gambled with, at another it is the bargain sale from the reservoir of public goods; or the money is pumped from one bubble into the next. The recipe for solving the climate crisis is called "Green Economy" – investment in new growing sectors, the opening of whole new markets under the guise of "sustainability". While those in politics and the economy responsible for the crises dash off from one summit to the next, another crisis is on the horizon: a crisis of legitimacy. Why stick to a system that is worldwide benefiting a few, yet harming the many? What would a just distribution of world resources look like? How can we achieve a lifestyle that produces fewer or even no system-inherent crises? In short: What's after capitalism?

Pressure from below: Struggles

Not only are the crises multiplying, also protests and riots are on the increase. In December 2010 the mass unrest in Tunisia begins, which drives out the head of state. Unrest is followed in

Algeria, and a revolution in Egypt leads to the fall of Mubarak. In Libya, Bahrain and Syria people resist authoritarian regimes, demanding fundamental democratic reforms.

Greece, Portugal, Spain - here as well mass protest has been mounting since spring 2011. It is particularly the young and educated who are resisting the impertinent neoliberal austerity budgets. Simultaneously, social protest is stirring from the heart of society in Israel. Here rising rents and cost of living are the central issues. In Romania, Hungary and Russia protest against racism and state repression is rising. Not to forget: since late summer the Occupy Movement in the US has been taking action, blocking not only Brooklyn Bridge, but also blocking and paralysing whole harbours. What are the similarities between the different riots and protests and where are the differences? How should we contextualise the upheaval in the Arab countries? What are the chances for permanent emancipatory change? These are just a few of the many questions and struggles that will occupy us during the congress.

One thing is clear: social movements are seldom predicted and unfortunately do not appear upon demand. Why do some scattered protests gather momentum and radiate over and above the local, while others, after a short boom, vanish from the scene leaving the destructive 'business as usual' to continue? How can the different actors of local struggles relate to each other? What could a inter- or transnational cooperation look like? How can social movements intensify and stabilise? How can solidarity and collective resistance be organised?

Increasing the pressure: Transformations

“Under Pressure – pushing down on me, pushing down on you”, are the lyrics of the classic song by Queen & David Bowie. People are also under enormous pressure. For many people the system's impertinence is of life threatening magnitude: seamstresses and sewers, who rebel against the exploitative working conditions in the world trade sweat shops; the rising numbers of Indian small scale farmers whose livelihoods are destroyed by multinational seed corporations; the migrant labours in China who collectively organise themselves; the people who cross the Mediterranean Sea to Europe under life threatening circumstances – just to name a few.

It is an overwhelming majority of people, who does not feel represented by the hegemonic politics and who is increasingly demanding to be heard. Thus change and the search for alternatives is starting – not only, but also – with the people. Everyone embodies the crisis of capitalism exactly at the instances when she or he is migrating, blocking, revolting, striking, networking... The forms and strategies of resistance are manifold. The process for transformation starts at the supposedly small: the refusal of each person to "agree" and "take part". How can we divert the pressure resting on us individuals towards the one that is destroying us?

Under the banner of "transformations" we dedicate ourselves to the concrete and doable: How can emancipatory change be implemented in daily life? What other examples of self-organisation, lifestyles and economics do exist? In this instance we dare to think out of the box of Realpolitik: how could the impossible-possible look like ? Here the utopian comes into play: What if...? What would we be like if...? Only if we arrive at a notion of how a totally different system of commodification could look like, we will be able to think and act beyond the status quo. Who would have thought two years ago that after decades of authoritarian regimes in North Africa and the Arab world, that these regimes would tumble and that in the US a big protest movement against neoliberal policies would raise serious pressure?

To discuss these and many other questions we invite you to the 34th Congress of the Federal Coordination of Internationalism. Come to Erfurt from the 17th till the 20th of May. Looking forward to some pressure charging and discharging...

your local organising team Erfurt

The BUKO Congress is taking place from the 17th till the 20th of May in Erfurt. This year it is organised locally by a network consisting of the student representative council FH, Education Kollektive (BiKo e.V.), revolta - anti-capitalist left, campus group LiSE, Plan B and various individuals. More information on the program and activities see www.buko.info.