

Report: 47th Linz Conference of the ITH

“Is One World Possible? Practices of ‘International Solidarity’ and ‘International Development’”

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“Labour Movements and Social Movements as Driving Forces in the Development of Societies and Individuals” is the overarching title of the present conference cycle 2010-2012 of the *International Conference of Labour and Social History/ITH*. The second conference in this thematic arch confronts the key notion of “development” with that of “solidarity”. “Development” is, of course, not a neutral concept, but one which carries with it connotations from the history of the balance of power between “North” and “South”, which chiefly manifested itself in the practices of “development aid” given by the “western” world to the “South” during the “Age of Development” from the 1950ies through to the 1990ies. Even today it is difficult to distinguish the concept of societal development on a worldwide scale from the practice of external active intervention intended to implement a “development” of the “underdeveloped” towards “more highly developed” social structures. For a long time, the objective was perceived as “catching-up” on the part of the “underdeveloped” countries with the structures of the “most highly developed” countries, and this was simply seen as the definition of “development”. In our time, this long-standing concept of “development” is being called into question at least at the intellectual level as a result of a *post-development* attitude.

In its specific form of manifestation, the concept of development as an exercise in “catching up” by means of “modernizing” is a product of the epoch of competition between world systems. During the period of systems competition the “socialist” world system possessed a counterpart, and this sector of “East-South” relationship laid claim to the concept of *Solidarity*. In other words, the “North-South” relationship as created by the “socialist” world system was to be wrought in the spirit of *solidarity*. A comparison between these “West-South” sectors of “development” or “development aid” and of “East-South”-*Solidarity* or “socialist assistance” has only been attempted in a highly rudimentary fashion. Consequently, a conference on these topics should entail real gains in insight into the matter. However, the history of *solidarity* cannot be reduced to such movements, parties, and organizations acting on behalf of states. For this reason, the conference scope was extended to include such non-governmental organizations as could be accommodated by the sections Labour Movements as societal actors, and Solidarity Movements and Liberation Movements as actors.

The conference gained its structure through the attempt to contrast the concepts of *Solidarity* and *Development*. Such an approach for the conference promised to provide new insights. However, it was not the intention to focus debates on ethics or moral philosophy but rather to approach the subjects from the historically implemented actual practices, on the “real and existing” *Solidarity* and *Development* as it were. The individual contributions were to look at the practices of *Solidarity* and *Development* at international level and how, in the post-colonial era, states, organizations, and movements in the “global North” were developed to deal with the states, organizations, and movements in the “global South”. The framework for these practices consists of the above-mentioned systems for international *development* “East” and “West” in a bipolar world; another framework are the initiatives to show “international solidarity” taken by “civil society”: structures like “Solidarity Brigades”, “Friendship Brigades” (shades of the “International Brigade” of the Spanish Civil War can be detected in these names) as well as solidarity campaigns.

International Solidarity was perceived as a concept for dealing with others on the basis of common interests and concerns, genuinely rooted in the traditions of the Labour Movement. *International Development* is perceived as a transformation of society by means of deliberate active intervention to achieve certain objectives like “Modernization” or, alternatively, “Socialism”. Both concepts were realized through transfers: transfers of concrete resources, of knowledge, working and living modes as well as of norms and standards. *Solidarity*, at least conceptually, can be described as a reciprocal transfer process – create social relations, the *lien social*. *Development* as a unilateral transfer process – transfer of resources. The universal concepts of *Solidarity* and of *Development* basically aimed at the creation of *one* (single) *world*. Hence the overarching title of this conference, with a question mark added. Every individual and every society can develop the entrepreneurial spirit, and the attitudes and practices linked to it, leading to prosperity, is the *credo* of those who fundamentally believe that “development” is tantamount to *growth* meaning increasing

material prosperity. Every society and every individual can be set on a "socialist developmental path" which, based on a planned economy and collectivisation under the leadership of the Party, will lead to an "all-round development" of individuals and collectives, would be the credo of a competing concept of development as progress towards socialism. We unite on the basis of a joint social position and interests, or of a political (or religious) stance, would be two variances of a stance based on *Solidarity*.

One central question discussed at the conference was whether, in the practical implementation of measures, the different concepts of *Development* and *Solidarity* came to resemble each other across the systems. In principle, historically labour movements have shared the historical concepts and practices which have existed since the Age of Enlightenment in which progress towards "civilisation" and "culture" constitutes the definition of development, a development which can be disseminated to the entire world. Was not the perceived objective of the European labour movements the creation of "one world" in which the material standards, working conditions, systems of social justice and ways of life according to the standards of the "most highly developed" were to reign?

Individual contributions

The conference opened with a block on the concepts and models of *Solidarity* and *Development*.

In his introductory paper, **Vijay Prashad** (Hartford/Connecticut) looked at the problems and difficulties relating to "international solidarity". The ruling international economic system which keeps labour and wages in a nation state framework whereas capital transcends borders with great facility does not form a solid basis for "international solidarity" going beyond grandiose declarations, was a sober conclusion in an otherwise flamboyant speech.

Reinhart Köbler (Freiburg/Br.) provided an overview of the various concepts of *Solidarity* and *Development*. Historically, it is possible to distinguish between two different types of *Solidarity*: one resting on similar interests on the basis of similar positions, and one resting precisely on dissimilarity, on distinction. Since the Age of Enlightenment we have the concept of *human solidarity* based on a humanitarian motivation, not on common interests. With *workers' solidarity* a new type of *group solidarity* on the basis of common interests emerged: the idea that when workers of one nation or country take action to ensure the improvement of pay and/or working conditions elsewhere, they pursue their own interest in maintaining wages and/or standards for themselves. Acting in *solidarity with* others because they are like oneself, live in a similar way and have similar interests and acting in *solidarity for* others because they are different constitute relationships of disparate natures motivating different types of movements, activities, and actors.

David Engerman (Waltham/Mass.) pinpointed a specific case of East-West competition in "the South" by means of Indian economic planning from the time of independence and until the mid-1960ies. Engerman demonstrated how Indian economic planners took advantage of the competition between Soviet and Western experts to gain space to pursue their own policies. The international experts were used more as a resource for justifying Indian economic policy than as a source for shaping this policy. In this respect Engerman is in agreement with that strand of literature which sees international development experts more as objects of strategies on the part of domestic development functionaries and elites than as actors in giving direction to the course of international development.

Susan Zimmermann (Budapest) in her contribution on "internationalism in solidarity" and the justification of humanitarian intervention points to the type of power structures lurking behind liberal justifications for intervention to promote human rights in a world fundamentally characterized by global injustice.

This block was followed by another concerning labour movements as actors in government functions. This was the venue for comparing East and West in the era of world systems competition. Contributions made by **Sara Lorenzini** (Trento) and **Berthold Unfried** (Vienna) took up the theme of state *Development Aid* and *Solidarity* systems of the GDR and FRG, respectively. Lorenzini contrasted the claims of the GDR of acting in *solidarity* with the country's practices in foreign trade with the "South", Unfried attempted to compare the *Solidarity* instruments and practices of the East and *Development Aid* of the West focussing on the posting of personnel and problems caused by such posting. The papers given by Lorenzini and Unfried permit us to distil the following aspects in the two systems of institutionalized *Development* and *Solidarity* manifesting themselves to varying degrees:

- cooperation on the basis of common (economic or political) interests and for an alleged "mutual benefit";
- *Mise en valeur*, "giving value" by means of material transfers and transfer of knowledge as kick-off investment for the purpose of "giving value" with the expectation of subsequent economic rewards flowing in the opposite direction; promotion of state foreign trade aimed at opening markets in such cases where the trading partner is not capable of entering the market;
- Moral aspects of a state activity sector as a building block in the creation of legitimacy for this state.

Hubertus Büschel (Gießen) attempted to demonstrate that beyond systemic differences, often practices of, sometimes violent, domination and even racism, lurked behind the fine sounding discourse of "helping people to help themselves" and of "Solidarity". From this viewpoint the substitution of practices based on racist distinction in the time of colonialism with the universalist position of *Development* and *Solidarity* in the post-colonial era loses the claim it might have had on constituting a caesura in history.

In a section on "Labour as a governmental actor" trade unions were the main focus. **Babacar Fall** (Dakar) gave a paper on trade union relations between France, the mother country, and West Africa in the late colonial era. **Françoise Blum** (Paris) introduced a hitherto virtually unknown chapter in trade union *solidarity* work of the CFTC/CFDT, the French trade union of Christian origin. In doing so, she presented a study on the left-Catholic scene which in France had a special role to play in the field of development policy activities. She establishes the existence of "bottom-up" internationalism motivated by Christianity. This introduces an original French contribution to the field of international development activity research.

Whereas French unions, particularly the CGT, can be seen as very active in setting up trade unions and in the transfer of labour standards from the mother country to the colonies, the paper given by **Annie Watson** (London) demonstrates relatively modest TUC activities in the Commonwealth countries. If this finding is further substantiated, appropriate explanations must be looked for.

In the contribution made by **Antonio Muñoz Sánchez** (Lisbon) it was made clear that the setting up of socialist parties along the lines of the SPD, in Portugal and Spain via the Friedrich Ebert-Foundation of the SPD could also be represented as "solidarity" or as an alternative form of "development policy" in Europe. In the discussion of the unity of the Eurozone we are, indirectly, reminded that the European "development policy" was also begun with countries in the south of Europe, viz. Spain, Portugal, Greece and also Yugoslavia.

In the section "Social Movements: Solidarity Movements, Solidarity Brigadists, and Liberation Movements as Actors" three rather disparate historical experiences foregathered:

In his paper, **Ulrich van der Heyden** (Berlin) attempted to make a contribution to the rehabilitation of the GDR "Friendship Brigades" as a genuine and not primarily governmental expression of the feeling of solidarity entertained by the population of the GDR. The question raised in his title, as to whether the FDJ-Brigades of Friendship of the GDR could be seen as an equivalent to the *Peace Corps* (i.e. the volunteer units established by US President Kennedy in the early part of the "development decade" of the 1960ies to be deployed for development purposes) remained open. With this original contribution made by the GDR to the repertoire of development policy practices Van der Heyden has opened up a worthwhile field of research for which a great deal of work is still required.

In his paper on European solidarity movements (Vietnam, Chile, Nicaragua) **Kim Christiaens** (Leuven) stressed the role played by "Third-World-Actors" focussing on Belgium as an example. In contrast to the existing literature which presupposes a spontaneous origin and a rather one-sided transfer in "North-South" solidarity movements, he points to the central role played by "South"-actors within these movements. This approach, which in his title he describes as "Orchestrating Solidarity", provoked contradiction in the discussions because, it was said, it reinforced the claims that the solidarity movements were governed by outside political forces. However, Christiaens explicitly stated that his research findings could not be used to support this type of argumentation embedded in the register of political instrumentalization.

Among solidarity movements in history, the Algeria solidarity movement certainly was one of the most important. In France, there were the *coopérants rouges* ("red development workers"), a group of people who, on the basis of political solidarity with the Algerian revolution, operated between the worlds of militant commitment and French government development aid after Algerian

independence. **Fritz Keller's** (Vienna) contribution concerning the Austrian branch of the Algeria solidarity movement reminded his audience that *solidarity* as personal commitment entailed personal risks and a considerable potential for disappointment – dangers stemming from participation or logistic support for a party in an armed conflict, as well as disappointment by the development of the government which emerged as a result of this conflict.

The *Solidarity* section of the conference included a panel discussion open to the public: "International Solidarity. Idea and Practice". Chaired by **Peter Huemer** (Vienna), the discussion assembled as a panelist **Michael Bohnet** (Bonn) active for many years as a practitioner and proponent of the trend known as the "Eppler Era" in West German "development aid". In it, elements of solidarity played a prominent role, and these practices were also reflected in Bohnet's research activities. He was contrasted with **Franz Nuscheler** (Linz), the academic researcher whose text books in "Development Aid" had informed generations of students in this field; he too had become active as a development advisor. The third panelist taken up for discussion was **Karin Fischer** (Linz), a university researcher with development policy and solidarity movement practice behind her.

Some conclusions from the conference's debates

The lively debates of the conference were stimulated by summarizing interventions by **Anja Kruke** (Bonn) and **David Mayer** (Wien). They showed the multiple facets of the notion and of the forms of *solidarity*: "Solidarity as an activity of the system" (Franz Nuscheler) at the state level (*Solidarity* "with a solid case", *dixit* Anja Kruke) on one side, *solidarity* as a practice of the individual on the other side. Accordingly different are the instruments to be scrutinized: trade at preferential conditions, projects of economic and social cooperation, transfer of material (money, equipment, armament) and immaterial (knowledge, prestige, connections) resources, posting of personnel operating the transfer of knowledge and attitudes. On a non-state level, even more instruments of *solidarity* are employed: collecting donations, personal commitment in the country of origin or in mission abroad (from the harvesting of coffee to the writing of letters to members of enemy forces in order to motivate them to defect and change sides), working with media, lobbying, organizing of campaigns.

The question of altruistic and of self-interested elements of practices of *solidarity* repeatedly turned up in the discussion. In a "realist" approach, state policies of *solidarity* and *development* are primarily to be analyzed in terms of strategy and self-interest. Although such terms of analysis may also apply in these cases, potential additional motivations are to be considered concerning "civil society" initiatives of *international solidarity*: political or religious convictions; emotion; the pursuit of self-development by the activities of *solidarity* and *development*; the expectance of feedback effects of the movements or countries with whom relations of solidarity have been engaged. *Solidarity* as a matter of mutual interest and as a matter of the heart. On the level of the individual, practices of *solidarity* require a commitment in the range of norms and values: elements of conviction, ideals, a disposition to heroism and sacrifice are part and parcel of such activities.

Another frequently raised question concerned the perspective of *solidarity*: overcoming or preserving difference. Are practices of *solidarity* implemented in order that the other shall develop like myself, or, alternatively, that the other shall develop like I would like to develop (or have developed) myself?

Thus practices of *solidarity* can be interpreted as practices of work on oneself: in cases when practices of *solidarity* also become practices of *self-development*. This was an explicit aim in the deployment of development workers and, in the competing system, of "Friendship Brigades".

A remarkable emphasis of the role played by "Third-World-Actors" inviting to reconsider traditional perceptions of a unilateral transfer process from actors in the "North" to recipients in the "South" distinguished the contributions made by Engerman and Christiaens.

The conference did not succeed to forge a common terminology out of the multiplicity of definitions, approaches and topics. The thematic scope was probably too broad for such a purpose. But the ample debate revealed that the coming together of this multi-coloured variety engendered a new international field of research.

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Conference Programme: www.ith.or.at/konf_e/zeitpl_2011_e.htm