

Alternatives: What is Necessary, What approaches do Already Exist?

Thank you very much for the invitation

I am very happy to speak to you today

I want to present you a view of alternatives from the Latin-Americans continent.

Because I think, that perhaps we can begin to thinking about the topic of connection between our impressions about alternative, they are possible. And our impression about the information we receive every day.

Inclusion or exclusion from the People is for me the connection between all topics here. And the fight against exclusion is one of the solutions to our problems.

Something within us -consciously or unconsciously- gives us the feeling that the protests that the media transport us, sometimes with more and sometimes less often, are not spontaneous. They are the result of many years of work. And they show us that they are a lot of possibility to created alternatives.

Often we look at the Latin America continent because we see that there are alternatives.

When the mass media speak about social movements, they show us often these pictures: they tell about social movements like something without control.

But rarely we see pictures or hear reports that provide us an account on alternative views, which are created by social movements.

All the time we get the information directly or not, that

"The system we have is imperfect, but it is the best"

But are you sure? And what is this system, we have.

- A system that depends on the concentration of capital and not his abolition.
- A system that try to make us believe that only the people who work hard are

necessary for the system and the others not. But the People can not define by them self which work should be done. The System tells us what hard work is. This is how the interest of the people and of the system gets in conflict.

But for us it is not enough to know that other people struggle to change this. It is necessary to talk about it again and again. We must seize every opportunity and not just, this is also very important, for example talking about the violation of human rights in Mexico or Honduras. It is important to talk about the alternatives, which the people of the Latin American continent develop, which are full of imagination, endurance and strength. Make them know, to speak about them here and there, if possible for sure, is also a way of support.

The development of social movements can not be separated from the observation about the elections in the recent years, which resulted in many of these countries progressive or leftist governments. This is interesting to observe because the officials, that were elected in high positions were directly linked to social movements. Here we have a several examples in Venezuela, Brazil, Argentina, Bolivia, Ecuador, Chile, Uruguay and Nicaragua.

And we can here speak about a lot of alternatives of the governments:
Unasur, TeleSur or the banc of south.

These so called "left turns" were only possible through the work of social movements, which ensured that the rhetoric of the left became attractive, especially since they were remained active for years.

For example the government in Brazil is support with the Workers Party (PT) and in Uruguay with the Frente Amplio: a broad alliance grew out of different social movements. While in Bolivia and Ecuador are mostly indigenous supporters of the presidents.

You see. The countries and policies differ a lot.

While all these states wish to depart from neoliberal political common sense, the conditions in which these countries and their governments are, are very different. This is how Hugo Chavez may in its infancy, with an absolute majority in parliament and the money from the oil industry makes it more easily to implement his promises for social improvements in Venezuela. The situation in Argentina with Nestor Kirchner and later with Cristina Fernández de Kirchner was and is very different. The first was elected with only 22% of the votes. He had to deal with high debts and budgetary problems. The progressive forces lost term in the last elections (July 2009) the majority in both chambers.

So I think it is important not to see the continent as a homogeneous continent.

Although many of the features are similar, their social and geopolitical context is in each of its regions differently developed. The demands of social movements have been achieved in different ways.

For example, in Uruguay, the ban of the privatization of water has been added to the constitution

Bolivia decided to give oil and gas back to the public hand.

The Government of Brazil, Ecuador and Venezuela make several steps to develop the solidarity or social economy and push the participation in the local regions.

Venezuela has in all this points a pioneering role.

The fight against poverty, land reform and a real departure from the neo-liberal policies can not be implemented from one day to the other, but at least have been breached in that direction. Every day more people recognize that neoliberal policies are the cause of their precarious social situation.

At this point in my presentation I want to clarify that Latin America is not the paradise. I'm far from romanticizing the countries of Latin America. But the people there are in constant movement. An example is that we have a broad spectrum of the left that is not aligned 100% behind the so called "left-wing" presidents. This is a very interesting aspect due to lack of time I can not dig. However, we can say that in general there are also those who do not believe in parliamentary politics, and partly blame these governments that do not break completely with the neo-liberal policy.

For example, in Argentina there are a part of the piqueteros movement and some leftist groups and intellectuals which criticize the government of Kirchner.

In Mexico, the Zapatistas have not supported at the time the candidate of the left, and recommended the boycott of the election.

On the other hand an important part of social activists have the opinion that the social movements must develop alternatives to exert pressure on these governments to implement their demands. This is reflected for example in a lot of people that no longer held in protest against the regular summit meetings of governments. In addition to that they organized alternative summits.

A basic idea behind this strategy is the conviction that it is very good that the parties take power, but must be built grass-roots structures that form the seed for a new society. Thus social movements require governments to change governmental structures and the governments need the social movements to implement their policies. This does not mean that social movements do not carry forward criticism, if they are convince that is necessary.

Here are some examples.

Perhaps you remember the crisis in Argentina in 2001.

When of the 19th and 20th of December 2001 the streets of Buenos Aires were filled of people, it seemed to have reached the end of neoliberal policies and economic debacle. The chaos after the resignation of President De la Rúa in the following days showed as an example about the conflict of interests of different groups in power.

In my opinion, they were two reasons of these protests:

- * First of all the growing deterioration of the economy difficulties hit both the State and the people in the same way.

- * Secondly the middle class was increasingly disappointed with the political situation and was impoverished. They lost their savings with the devaluation of the currency.

This tense situation was crowned by the behaviour of social elites who defended themselves in different regions of the country against the loss of legitimacy, trying to maintain on a media and discursive control of the situation.

The government declared a State of emergency on December 19 and this led to a collective memory of the people of Argentina and to an active response: The protest was a direct action against a presidential decree. In this case an elected Government. You can imagine this protest as activities against governments' decisions that can be interpreted as a kind of politics that could be construed by the public as state terrorism measures. During this time of the revolt the people recognized more and more not to rest any more on themselves, but to begin to struggle collectively.

Spontaneously in many neighbourhoods of Buenos Aires and other provinces of Argentina peoples Assemblies were founded. Some of them have already existed before and the existing movements, such as recovered factories under workers control and piqueteros, received more attention and the support increased.

Resistance and collective organization could be normal, but in many societies is only close and thinkable in times of crises. These protests were not a hasty idea of the Argentines, but the result of a long and exhausting process.

These pictures you can see here are the answer to years of continuous exploitation. But the mass media show that to the whole world and also to Argentina like

something dangerous.

In this case the interesting and unusual point is not the emergence of solidarity in Argentinean society itself, but the struggle for their development of this very solidarity and the continuous struggle every day to build a life with dignity.

Argentina provides a good example to understand what is happening around the world. The Argentinean case shows us of ten years of neoliberalism what other countries are going through now. May be much slower and may be not in that intense way.

In my opinion the problem is, that neoliberalism has succeeded that societies under economic underdevelopment accept their conditions as normal or even naturally.

But the recent events in Argentina present us clearly that social changes are possible. One of the most important social changes was introduced by the workers in the factories. They are as workers affected by the division of the labor process in a direct way: They do not produce for themselves, but they are the only ones, who can produce. They have broken this rule by equating the factories and reorganizing it under their own control. In Argentina there are now about 180 companies working in this way.

This is a picture of one of them: Chilavert a print factory.

And what is a factory under workers control?

This is a kind of factory, where the workers their own are responsible for everything. Each of these companies has its own history and its own process of reorganizing and socializing the producing process. In general we can say that the fundamental elements of organization are a rotary system and workers assemblies. The legal definition is cooperatives. But it is much more.

We find these kinds of factories in Argentina, Brazil, Bolivia and Venezuela and I am sure in other countries around the world.

Venezuela is also important in this point, because they are protected in the Constitution. A constitution drafted by a people assembly. If you want to know more about the development of Venezuela in particular, I advise you the studies and the documentary films of Dr. Dario Azzellini.

Other examples refer to the field of alternative media. Social movements are struggling for decades for the right of communication.

The mass media do not act anymore as the fourth estate, the controlling power of the other three powers (executive, legislative and judicative) but they still suppose to do that.

A lot of examples and studies show us these situations.

One of them was the conflict between the Kirchner Government and the landowners. The announcement of higher export taxes on soybeans and corn in the year 2008 led to the conflict.

The social group who was affected were not the farmers, but the great land owners. Their interests concentrate only on profits and capital gains.

And in a sense the arrogance of the media led to a discussion about a new broadcasting law.

Now we do not hear anymore news about this conflict and we have not heard any news about the new law on audiovisual media services in Argentina.

This law was promoted by social movements, human rights organizations, political parties and intellectuals.

And this law was discussed at people meetings around the country, and which passed in both chambers on October last year.

Social movements are working now on its regulation. The law of audiovisual communication is internationally one of the most advanced communication issues, because it defines communication as a human right and understands the responsibility

of the State to protect that right and the people.

And what do you think, are all they examples (and they are only a part of a lot) an accident or a miracle?

No way!

This is the result of the struggles of the social movements, who are engaged since 2004 in information campaigns and political lobbying.

This year on middle of July, another progressive law was passed: the law for the recognition of "marriage between persons of the same sex". And that is also an achievement of the social movements, human rights organizations, etc., who are engaged since 2003 in campaigning and lobbying work.

Now the social movements claim for the law of the rights to abortion. And this law it does not mean only to have a right to abortion. It means also that women have the right and the control on their own bodies. It is also a feminist achievement.

Now some define these struggles as new urban struggles. And in part I agree. In rural areas they have also other struggles and conflict areas. The special situation is that they rural and urban struggling groups are more and more connected together.

Let us look briefly to Mexico and let me give you an example that perhaps sounds firstly banal. The prices of condoms in Mexico were so high that people could only buy them with high purchasing power. An organized group of sex workers in Mexico is struggling since years for legal recognition as sex workers. They joined the Zapatista group and as a solution for one of their social and political problem. They began producing their own condoms. These condoms do not cost more than 1 peso. This led to the situation that everywhere in Mexico, where these condoms were on the market, the prices for other commercial condoms must have been reduced too

lower the price of the condoms. This is also an alternative.

But now back to Argentina and let us make a stop in the north, in the province Santiago del Estero. I want to talk about the indigenous and farmer movement of Santiago del Estero: MOCASE- Via Campesina.

For over 20 years they are organized to fight for their land. From time to time suddenly people were coming with so called legal certifications who claimed that they are the real landowners. So the peoples, who lived there for generations, had to take refuge because they were banished. Sometimes they were offered a bit of money. We know well a lot of these stories. But we hear nothing about their struggles, their ideas and their way of life full with sustainability and solidarity.

These people managed to organize themselves in the Mocase-Via Campesina. They decided 1996 to develop ways of free communication. The technological developments and the solidarity of other social movements in recent years made it possible, that they could communicate even better through radio. The Radio is in many places the only way of communication. A radio reports for example if a doctor is in the region, if the bus only passes once a day or week really passes or not.

So the everyday life is organized also by the radio, which is reachable by everybody, also in the rural areas. But it is also used to transfer their voices about their rights. Another important point is they can hear the music they like. And this is not a contradiction. Fun is an important part of the struggle. The radio is always on, in every home, no matter where, in places where there is not even electricity, you can find a radio.

It is a communication tool and it is a tool for mobilization.

This is a picture from the radio Paj Sachama. The only radio, that works with solar energy worldwide.

Well, as far as I know. Perhaps you have another information, please tell me about.

That is very interesting for me to know.

To get to the radio station the people must walk 40 km on foot. They do their program and they stay there for one or two days. When they are there, they also work together: they make meetings or prepare jams and other regional foods, which are sold and the profit will go to the whole movement and to the people who work in it.

All these examples show the diverse characteristics of the struggles to include and organize people. They make a break with the exclusion and competition in a commercially organized society. They collectively construct a social system that is based on solidarity and mutual respect.

We can reach in all sectors in which we work changes in the system. We can fight for our demands. We can reach changes concerning environmental protection and the distribution of wealth. We can reclaim a greater integration for all of us.

Simply: fighting against the criminalization of social protest, and in general against of all kinds of repression and rearmament.

I know!

There is still much to do. Many people in Latin America show that the construction of alternatives is possible. And that this work is reachable within a struggle in process.

I would like to leave you with an appointment of Charles Tilly:

"We know that a new era does not begin with a new elite, or a new Constitution, but when ordinary people begin to use new ways to fight for their interests"

I am convincing!

We can also do a lot for this change.

We can support them there or here.

If we know this option we should try to develop our alternatives.

It is very important to understand:

It is not only to support them.

It is also about us!

Thank you very much for your attention