

## **Gerard Kester's search for democracy: on the autobio of a Dutch academic specialist on worker self-management**

**Peter Waterman**

### **Interviewer's introduction**

I was intrigued when a former colleague in Labour Studies at the Institute of Social Studies (ISS), The Hague, told me that he had written his autobiography. This was about six months after I had published mine (Waterman 2014). This colleague was Gerard Kester, who had welcomed me into Labour Studies at the ISS in The Hague, when I joined as a specialist on Third World unions in the early 1970s.

Gerard, specializing on workers' participation and self-management, was for me both a model and challenge. When I arrived, 1972, Gerard was already well-established at the Institute, busy with teaching, consulting for various other institutes and governments, with research in Malta, field-cum-research trips to Yugoslavia, and then with doing a PhD part-time (Kester 1980) during the breaks permitted by our nine-month labour studies diploma programme. Although we had radically different orientations toward the latter, I am not sure that without his model, I would ever have done my PhD (many of our colleagues never completed PhDs).

All I actually now wanted from Gerard was to know what his reaction might be to my autobio, in which he gets some mention. What I received from him was some 1,000 pages of his own autobio (Kester 2014)! The work, which is in Dutch, was unpublished, though Gerard had had it professionally edited and laid out. And it was, and is, therefore camera-ready for either a print or online publication. I want to see it published – in both Dutch and English. But he has reasons for holding up immediate publication.

Reading Gerard's draft, I was struck by parallels, not only in the decade or so we had been together in Labour Studies at the ISS. We are of almost the same age (he is around 79, I am 80 as I write this). He, like me, had started his working life as a journalist, though his experience was even shorter than mine. He was, when I first met him, 1972, married, like me, with two kids, though his were a little younger than mine. He, like me, had had some relationship with the international solidarity/development work of the major Dutch trade union confederation, the FNV.<sup>1</sup>

Gerard, like me, travelled widely for his work in the Third World/Developing Countries (take your pick), since ours was and is an institute of development studies. Gerard worked heavily in Africa, whilst I did my PhD on Nigerian trade

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<sup>1</sup> For my recent take on some 40 years of the FNV's international solidarity-cum-development cooperation operations, see Waterman (2015)

unions, and been early involved with the South African ones. Gerard had been a frequent visitor to (the then) Communist Yugoslavia and studied 'worker participation and self-management' there.

But any parallels, so far as they were such, were matched (mismatched?) by radical differences of direction. Gerard, whilst never tied to any of them played, I would say, a role close to that of the national and international labour institutions toward the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. I played a marginal one, oriented toward a future labour movement of the – or anyway of my - imagination.

I should say something more about 'Workers' Participation and Self-Management', as the issue appeared in the 1970s-80s. In one of my questions below I mention the book by Assef (now Asef) Bayat on Workers' Control and Self-Management. Elsewhere (Waterman 1993) I commented on this book as follows:

Struggles against authoritarianism within the wage-labour situation are traditional to the labour movement, expressed in terms of 'workers' control', 'workers' self-management' or 'workers' participation'. Recent writing here, however, is taking it beyond the traditional framework by recognising the crisis of socialist strategies, by taking an international perspective (including, for example, tropical African experiences and South African union policy), or by making connections between labour demands and those of the New Alternative Social Movements (see Bayat 1991). The work of Bayat is exceptional in its address to democracy more generally, its awareness of the new social issues and movements, and its response to a range of contemporary literature on alternative social models. His conclusion on the possibilities existing under non-authoritarian capitalist conditions in the Third World are that control may take at least four forms: 1) 'natural' workers' control in the petty-commodity sector; 2) the democratisation of cooperatives; 3) state-sponsored forms resulting from worker pressure (Malta); 4) union attempts to influence enterprise management and national development policy (tropical Africa), efforts of plant-level unions to counter employers' attacks resulting from changing industrial structures (India).

I am not sure that in his autobio Gerard makes such distinctions, either with respect to 'self-management' or to 'democracy'. And I note that recently another veteran of international - or at least European - labour relations, the Marxist Richard Hyman (2015) is discussing 'the very idea of democracy at work'. He concludes:

[T]he struggle for the democratization of work and of the economy requires a new, imaginative – indeed utopian – counter-offensive: a persuasive vision of a different and better society and economy, a convincing alternative to the mantra of greed, commodification, competitiveness and austerity, a set of values which connects with everyday experience at the workplace. Whether this is described as 'good capitalism', post-capitalism or socialism is of secondary importance. The

urgent need is to regain an inspiring vision of unions as a 'sword of justice', which many trade union movements seem to have lost. In other words, unions have to articulate a more humane, more solidaristic and more plausible alternative if they are to vanquish neoliberalism, finding new ways to express their traditional core principles and values and to appeal to a modern generation for whom old slogans have little meaning. And since defending the weak is inescapably a question of power, unions have to help construct a new type of politics – in particular, by engaging with campaigning and protest movements that attract the Facebook and Twitter generation in ways which most trade unions have failed to do (even if many have recently begun to make serious efforts in this direction). Do unions dare to abandon old rules and routines in order to create new strategies? What is required is nothing less than a multinational liberation struggle!

Hyman does not consider the increasingly-all-encompassing but disputable terrain of the digital economy, nor does he consider another possible slogan for his alternative world – 'All in Common!'. But he does raise profound questions about 'worker's self-management', 'democracy', and the relation between these, that I think Gerard tends to circumvent.

Reason enough, anyway, for wanting to interview Gerard. And suggesting he reframe, at will, my questions and add any I had failed to pose.

*Peter Waterman, December 2015-April 2016*

**1. This interview is for an *Interface* Special on Social Movement Autobiographies. In what sense would you consider 'Workers Participation and Self-Management' (WP&SM) a social movement?**

I consider WP&SM a social movement in a larger perspective of the democratization of the economy and it is the latter I address in my autobio. This may become clear in my answers to your subsequent questions. My lifetime research interest was the democratization of labour relations and of the economy. The notion of 'worker participation' came in handy to get access to information and funds as WP was innocent and popular. My research was not in relation to the past or present, but to the future (you and I share that orientation) hence my love for 'theories of dynamics'.

**2. You seem to have considered WP&SM as crucial to the title of your autobio, 'A Search for Democracy'. Do you consider WP&SM to be fundamental to democracy everywhere? Now and in the future? A global issue rather than one for the Third World/Developing Countries that the ISS was focused on?**

This is a misunderstanding. My title 'A Search for Democracy' has only indirectly to do with WP&SM, it is, rather, a reference to democracy in general and should lead to what is going to be the third volume, an autobiographic look ahead to the future of Europe when the struggle must be waged to get the economy under democratic control. It is true that there is much on WP&SM in my autobiography as I have done a lot of research and published widely on it (see Bibliography). I realize that many people saw this as part of my identity. (In Malta I was often greeted as 'Mr Participation'). But I was not a fan of WP as I found it, and my publications make this clear. I was - as I wrote so many times - disappointed with almost all existing worker participation systems I came across and exhausted myself in proposals on how to make participation more meaningful and effective and turn it into instruments in which management and employers could be made accountable to employees.

My real love was fully fledged *self-management*, hence my interest in and studies of Yugoslavia, an Israeli kibbutz and self-managed enterprises in Malta, Sri Lanka and Mali – enterprises which were occupied or taken over by workers and or trade unions. Sadly enough, self-management in Yugoslavia and in all the firms elsewhere no longer exists. Only the kibbutz remains but I understand that a recent wave of privatization has been drastically reducing the number of kibbutzim.

No, I do not think WP&SM is specifically relevant to Third World countries. Beating the neoliberal enterprise is a challenge anywhere in the world, this is the challenge to democracy in general. See my answer to your next question.

**3. I recall Workers' Participation *and/or* Self-Management as being labour movement issues in Western Europe and parts of the Third World in the 1970s-80s. This as part of a Post-1968 upsurge in labour and socialist protest and writing at that time (see for example Bayat 1991). I have the impression that interest in WP&SM declined in the 1990s. And then, again, that at least the Self-Management/Workers' Control part, has risen in the new century, now in connection with what I call the 'global justice and solidarity movement', and today using the language less of democracy or socialism than of 'radical-democratisation' or 'the commons'. How do you see the matter?**

As you know, there is a world of difference between worker participation and self-management. The first is normally a complement to the privately-owned firm (not always) and the second a definite departure from it. I am extremely happy that, especially in Latin America, self-managed firms are on the increase but hope that they will not face the same fate as the firms I just mentioned, in Malta, etc.

Recently I read an interesting book, *What is to be Done : A Dialogue on Communism, Capitalism and the Future of Democracy*, involving the communist philosopher, Alain Badiou, and the liberal-democrat, Marcel

Gauchet (Badiou and Gauchet 2015). They addressed the same question as Lenin did in 1902 : What is to be Done?, Reformism or Revolution? Poor Badiou did not, of course, want to be associated with the real-life experience of state communism, but was also unable to explain how the communist hypothesis (as he calls it) could be realised without falling back again into totalitarianism. Undemocratic, that is. For him of course 'reformism' is a dirty word. Gauchet argues that reformism is the instrument of change in democracy, and I think the same way. Democracy must and can be the instrument for change - also for fundamental change.

I suspect that the fashion of many writers in speaking of 'radical democracy' or 'revolutionary democracy' is an attempt to smuggle a single ideology (Marxism I presume) back into political discourse, but understanding that the word democracy must feature somewhere today. Let us accept that change, also fundamental change, should be part of the democratic process and not be achieved in a totalitarian way. That is what I have always argued, but this was dismissed as bourgeois bullshit, as the word 'reform' was considered reactionary.

Nevertheless Badiou correctly says that private ownership is the holy cow of capitalism. Indeed, private ownership is the central motor of neoliberalism and it is there where fundamental change is needed. But not by resorting to collective or state ownership. The essence of private ownership lies in the rights derived from it. So let us seek to change the legal framework and the rules of the game, define capital as a cost and labour as a value and link labour-capital relations to the core values of freedom, equality and solidarity. A cumulative series of structural reforms is needed, which are democratically decided and implemented, transforming private ownership into social ownership.

#### **4. How do you see your own academic work and socio-political engagement over the decades? A steady line? A rising one? Something that goes in waves? Or what?**

In waves, as far as academic work is concerned. That is inherent in empirical research. It seems to me that here is a great difference between writers who keep ruminating and replaying 19th century ideology, even if it makes for a continual publication output.

Empirical researchers may have years of publishing silence whilst they collect data through interviews, case studies and so on which finally lead to publication. They do not reproduce ideology; they listen and look and report in all honesty what they observe, whether or not it fits their own ideology. So unavoidably they publish in waves. Once a period of empirical research is over they can publish substantively.

In my case there have been four such waves. The first was after I had finished my research on self-management in Yugoslavia and Malta - three books

published between 1976 and 1981 (see again, the Bibliography). A long silence afterwards when I was collecting data in Africa as well as in Europe, a period of incubation. Then came the second wave, five books published between 1992 and 1999). This was followed by another period of incubation. In 2007 I published a book summarizing all my research. And now I am in my fourth wave, there are the two volumes of my autobio and a concluding book on the future of democracy in Europe (Kester 2014, 2015 and Forthcoming).

As for political engagement that is different, this is not a question of being a researcher but of being a citizen. There are no waves, I have always been a democrat at heart, my democratic commitment continually rising but my worries about the functioning of democracy have been also continually growing.

**5. Your autobio was inspired by and addressed to your grandchildren. And written in Dutch. It comes over as very much the work of a family man. And, of course, it has, scattered throughout, letters directly addressed to these. To what extent, then, might it, in English translation, communicate to the kinds of workers, unionists or researchers in Europe or the Global South with whom you worked and write about?**

As already suggested, it was my grandchildren who asked me to write my autobio, even if they expected a different one from what I finally produced. And perhaps that is because I am not, as you suggest, a family man but a man of the 20<sup>th</sup> century who is very much concerned about the possible development of democracy in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. I do a lot of work and should therefore be considered a workaholic rather than a family man.

I do address my worries to my grandchildren but not only to them, hence the title of the autobio. Indeed, the two volumes are actually addressed to all the groups you mention, in short, to the next generations. What I wanted to do was to draw out of my own very personal and professional experience a vision of a better future. That is why my autobio is unfinished. The third volume, that I am currently working on, is precisely trying to draw lessons from the past and project them as a vision of the future. Not that I think I have the answers, but at least I would like them, and also others, to take the future and not the past – as is unfortunately the case today - as the point of reference. And develop a vision for themselves. I have no pretensions here; I know too well that my vision is only one of billions.

**6. Do you read or have you read any other auto/biographies? Did you have any such in mind when you wrote yours? How on earth did you ever manage to write 1,000 pages?**

Only a few biographies: of Tchaikovski, Verdi, Rimsky Korsakov, Mussorgski, Pushkin, Kazantzakis and Theodorakis, and only one autobiography, by Peter Waterman! No, I had none of these bios in mind at all. I took my old diaries (I had saved all of them) as well as all the letters I had written to my wife (I was travelling so often that I wrote many such), my travel reports and publications, and started writing, just for the fun of it. And because my grandchildren asked me to. I wrote under what most would consider strange conditions, mostly in parks, on terraces of cafés and restaurants in Buenos Aires, with lots of wine. Hence the 1,000 pages. But, as already suggested, it is not yet finished. I am now working on the third volume, a sort of an autobiography of the future – I wish I had a model for that, and I should perhaps drink less wine.

**7. Your life's work was made possible by the ISS in which you worked, the endorsement and/or funding of the Dutch FNV union federation and even of the Dutch state and European Union. Did you see any contradiction between such institutions/funders and your 'search for democracy'? Or between their priorities and yours (which I understand to have been to create a relationship of solidarity with those you were working with internationally)?**

I was not actually 'involved with the solidarity/development work of the FNV'. I approached them to get funding for a research-cum-education and training program in Africa. I had consulted several universities in Africa as well as the Organisation of African Trade Union Unity (OATUU, then under Denis Akumu and Abdoulaye Diallo), and the Ghana National Association of Teachers (GNAT, then led by ISS labour studies graduate Thomas Bediako). I submitted a long-term plan which the FNV accepted and financed. Many plans were submitted to them for finance later, but I never got involved in FNV-initiated plans or projects.

I could not care less about any contradictions you mention as long as I could carry out my research in search of more democracy. But you are perhaps too cynical about the motives of ISS and FNV (are they against democracy?) or even the Dutch state and the European Union: they do have funds to work on the development of democracy and it would have been crazy not to make use of such.

**8. Your major effort over a decade or more was the APADEP (African Workers' Participation and Development Programme), based at the ISS in The Hague, and resulting in numerous publications, but working with African trade unions at national and regional level, carrying out research and creating some labour studies centres there. Given the subsequent development of Africa and its unions, particularly the Organisation of African Trade Union**

### **Unity (OATUU) and the South African COSATU, how do you now evaluate your APADEP efforts?**

It is difficult, if not impossible, to evaluate the impact of APADEP. More than 10,000 people took part in its activities, many of them in a one- or two-week education programme, but also hundreds of them in much longer programmes and in research and publication activities.

Many present African trade union leaders, at different levels, are APADEP alumni, including Kwasi Adu-Amankwah, the present General Secretary of the African Regional Organisation of the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC). Kwasi was for long one of the central figures in APADEP.

An African Labour Research and Education Centre has been established at the African ITUC headquarters in Lomé – a continuation of APADEP. At the University of Cape Coast post-graduate diploma programmes, begun by APADEP, are still being offered. Kessie Moodley (of the Workers College, South Africa), another key APADEP figure, set up a very successful African Labour Education Network (ALLEN) in keeping with the APADEP tradition of labour education. So much for the 'structural' consequences of APADEP. What has been the effect on African labour relations? Difficult to judge. Sometimes I get appreciative letters, for instance one from Guinée in which the trade union stated that it was thanks to the APADEP education programme throughout the country that a national general strike in 2007 was successful. But on the whole, I find it indeed difficult to evaluate the impact.

I am glad you asked about OATUU. I thought it should not have been in APADEP from the moment Hassan Sunmonu (a major Nigerian union leader) became General Secretary in 1986. He remained so for more than 25 years following repeated elections. His tenure resembled the lifetime dictatorship of some African political leaders (that he himself criticized unless they shared his ideology or sent generous cheques to keep OATUU running). All this demonstrated his disdain for democracy. The Dutch FNV continued to support him for reasons of political correctness until they eventually dropped him like a hot brick.

The OATUU was not a trade union organisation, it was a political invention of the Organisation of African Unity to keep trade unions under control, it collected funds from more or less dubious governments, not from workers, and used these mainly for its own survival as an organisation, or for the diplomatic (!) privileges of some of its staff. I never caught OATUU in the act of defending worker claims or rights. Its main role appeared to be to play the hero at conferences of the International Labour Organisation and ensure its candidates would get lucrative positions in that body. I know this sounds cynical but in my many years of intense contact with it I have not been able to ever discover an achievement other than going with rhetorical speeches from congress to conference, reaping per diems, sometimes doing double invoicing, stating they spoke on behalf of many millions of members.



**9. I have always wanted to know how much funding, from outside the ISS, went into APADEP? I have a feeling this must have run into five or six figures, in Euros, over the decades. Can you give details or at least a ballpark figure?**

In as far as I can remember my research was always generously funded. Before APADEP I received money to conduct a national attitude survey of construction workers, of approximately 50,000 guilders (22,000 euros), and from the Sri Ram Foundation in India the equivalent of about 12,000 euros to conduct an attitude survey of industrial clerks around Delhi.

Thereafter I received substantial amounts from the University of Malta to conduct a series of studies there, and from the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs I 'brokered' several hundreds of thousands of guilders for a comparative study of worker participation and self-management in Asia, Africa, America and Europe, through the International Centre of Public Enterprises in Ljubljana in former Yugoslavia.

The overall APADEP programme, from 1981 to 2008, in some 27 African countries, was financed by the FNV to the amount of around 3 to 4 million euros, by the Dutch Ministry of Development Cooperation to the amount of 4 million euros also, topped up by contributions from the European Union (some 100,000 euros), and the Friedrich Ebert and the Adenauer Foundations some minor amounts. Finally, the so-called Scenario 21 project on the future of democracy in the European economy (including more than 10 countries) was financed by the European Union through the French Democratic Trade Union Confederation, CFDT, amounting to more than a million euros. Democracy costs money, doesn't it?

**10. Whilst we were both attached to the ISS, 1970s-90s, we also both had major conflicts with the ISS itself or with other colleagues there. How do you see such now?**

I never had conflicts with ISS or with colleagues there: they had conflicts with me! It must be my fault. My son and daughter have the same problem, even my youngest granddaughter. Our fault is to be too direct and too honest and to express ourselves accordingly. Recently that granddaughter, 14 years old, went up to her teacher to ask him to explain his behaviour to her. How I see it now? I would not wish everybody to be like that, but it helps to have some brave people who are not afraid to stick their neck out, right?

My conflicts with ISS staff did not hinder me in any way. As I had my own projects financed with 'outside' money I was what I call in my autobio an *intrapreneur*, I made use of the facilities of ISS and had to pay overhead costs but otherwise I was in command of my own budgets for activities of the moment. For the last twenty years of my work at ISS I was fully independent in

that sense and had sufficient funds to have a good team of supportive staff at ISS. To my great surprise (and still I cannot imagine how this was possible) I was not accountable to anyone.

**11. Either alongside or subsequent to your APADEP work, you were active on WP&SM in West and East Europe. How do you now evaluate such efforts?**

In part these efforts yielded very little, in part they had unexpectedly positive results, in part they left me frustrated.

The work I coordinated together with Henri Pinaud (a CNRS researcher in Paris), the so-called Scenario 21 Project, on a revitalisation of democratic participation in Europe, did not have a follow-up. Two books were published (one with a long preface by Left French and European politician, Jaques Delors) but were completely ignored in the wake of the neoliberal wave, in which the mainstream European trade union movement was also trapped. (See Kester and Pinaud 1996)

My research and other activities in Malta had a far more positive outcome. In my 1980 book I had proposed the setting up of an autonomous research and education centre at the University which would monitor the development of democratic labour relations, contribute to policy making, run training and education courses, and should, for all these activities, be governed by all relevant social partners. To my surprise such a centre was established one year later and is still flourishing today, after 35 years, as the Labour Studies Centre of the University of Malta. I am still an Honorary Board member.

My main disappointment lies with (former) Yugoslavia. For many years my heart was with the genuine efforts of so many people who wanted humane, solidary and democratic labour relations, even when the national political system was totalitarian and therefore undemocratic, and whilst inter-ethnic strife was also increasingly undermining the federation. When it fell apart, especially in the way it did, I cried many tears. I cannot and will not give up my admiration for the people who were committed to worker self-management, some of whom are still active today trying to defend it. I am still in contact with Vera Vratusha who keeps publishing on self-management and encourages and supports others all over the world.

**11. Your autobio is far from confined to WP&SM or other work, dealing at length and detail with your childhood, your Catholic education, your youthful cycling and hitchhiking adventures, your past and present families, your consultancies internationally, your cultural tourism, your love of good food and (white?) wines, your recent travels to Argentina and Russia. Do you understand yourself as an academic, a consultant, a bon viveur? a cosmopolitan? an**

**internationalist? a workaholic (your own term)? Or all of these? Or something different?**

A *bon vivant* first of all, together with my wife Sonja. Life is short and should be lived. And workaholics can only survive with good food and good wine - red wine in particular - preceded by a glass of good white. Cosmopolitan, of course. Academic ... not all the way, perhaps too normative and too much motivated to have an impact on policy and politics. Sport has been and still is an essential part of my lifestyle, my bicycle is still my best friend. I never drove a car.

**11. We each wrote our autobiographies without knowing of the other's effort. I also started making notes, comparing the two, under the working title 'Touching but not Parallel: Different Life Paths in International Labour Studies and Solidarity'. I have laid this aside (for at least the time being) in favour of this interview. But, bearing in mind these differences – not to mention our considerable conflicts whilst in labour studies at the ISS – I am curious about how you might see these two works, which differ not only in length (mine published online, some 300 pages, referenced and footnoted, intended to address the 'global justice and solidarity movement'), yours (unpublished, some 1,000 pages, much less 'academic', more personal and addressed to your descendants)?**

You have already answered the question, even if I would rather say: parallel but not touching. We both had an international outlook and even when based in The Hague, our activities and interests were anywhere around the globe except in The Hague or even in Holland. But, as I already said, yours was an ideological enquiry, mine was an empirical one. Not that you did not conduct empirical research – but that was not your main activity. Not that I did not interest myself in ideologies, but empirical research was my main activity. No wonder we clashed regularly, I always distrusted you as leaning towards a triumphalist dogmatism, you distrusted me as leaning toward bourgeois democracy. More recently, you seem to have come closer to my point of view, but you will of course say that I came closer to yours. Whoever is right, the meeting point was democracy and that we should both rejoice.

**12 Gerard, it seems to me that 'Worker Self-Management' is today increasingly being linked to related initiatives, now under the general rubric of 'The Commons'. I attach a relevant recent document (Convergence Assemblée 2015). So I would like to add a question about it to the others posed above. Would you like to provide an additional answer?**

It is interesting that all through history initiatives for self-determination emerge in reaction to attempts to kill it. First against feudalism, then against industrialist exploitation and now against global financial capitalism. Core values are associated labour, democracy, equality, community service, solidary surplus distribution. These initiatives are again on the increase today and could become an impetus for the imagination of an alternative vision of the economy. Typically, they come from below which make them genuine and at the same time vulnerable. If the Argentinian 'factories without bosses' and similar cooperative projects want to escape the fate of similar experiences in the past they will have to organise themselves and establish alliances, find appropriate legal formats and most importantly, a common supporting structure to provide education and training, to conduct research and evaluation, assist in marketing and financing -to mention just a few requirements. If that succeeds, a critical mass may be reached and the movement may become an important link in the democratisation of the economy. But the impression I have is that at present the main activity which binds the more or less isolated self-management experiences together is a vibrating intellectual academic debate (with dogmatic overtones) which may be useful to generate an ideological orientation but is far from sufficient to render effective practical support. Perhaps the ball is in the court of the trade unions to take up the challenge of support or even or to play at least a significant role in it. The main challenge is to fight neoliberalism, head on, and not to contend with some marginal (romantic?) experiments only.

### **13 Do you have any additional or alternative questions?**

Yes, I would like to say more, about the third volume mentioned above, and how I will try to translate my life experience into a vision for the future.

That is what keeps me busy right now and again I keep the faces of my grandchildren in front of me. Because the future is their future. I want to limit myself to their continent, Europe. I decided to imagine how Europe will look like a hundred years from today. I am working on it right now and will give you an idea of the impossible task I am setting for myself. Because one cannot predict the future, I know that bloody well, but one can imagine the future.

Of course I am sure that by that time – as you will agree - there will be a United States of Europe. But that is not just going to be a lifting of national to continental scale as people like Guy Verhofstadt (former Belgian Prime Minister) would like to see (Verhofstadt 2015). It will be, in my imagination (I avoid the word 'vision') a different Europe, qualitatively, not just structurally. I am trying to elaborate four dimensions of such a development: migration, 'western' arrogance, the utopia of neoliberalism, and re-inventing democracy. I will briefly elaborate.

The most forgotten aspect when imagining the future of Europe is the impact of migration. It is now mostly seen as a burden, but it will turn out to be an asset. Not - or in any case not in the first place - because it will solve labour market

problems in the long run. Much more importantly, it will bring new blood to a continent which is suffering quasi-incestuous nationalist feelings. Migrants do not know national borders in Europe, they have no ground (*Blut und Boden*) in this or that country or region of Europe. Being borderless they will promote cosmopolitan ideas and practices. And they will become a catalyst in overcoming the so-called 'clash of civilisations'. They will, together with progressive Europeans, re-invent Europe.

Concurrently, European arrogance, with its double standards and (together with the US) exaggerated show of military power will, in the new multipolar context, dwindle.

It will become evident that neoliberalism is a utopia full of illusions: the freedom illusion, the equality illusion (Piketty 2013), the solidarity and democracy illusion (Rosanvallon 2006, 2008, 2011 and 2015), and the Europe illusion (Verhofstadt 2015).

Therefore and finally, democracy will be re-invented. Until now democracy has been unable able to realize the core values of *liberté, égalité* and *fraternité*. So democracy has to be re-launched, not only as a political procedure but also as an ideology of its own – replacing the invisible hand of neoliberalism with the visible citizen, free, equal and solidary, in an economy that must, therefore, be democratically controlled.

## **Interviewer's in/conclusions**

*I do not want to here raise either old or new challenges I might have to Gerard's view of either democracy or worker's self-management. I would prefer that others might do so in following issues of Interface. I am happy enough to continue a dialogue that we might have carried out, at least verbally, in our programme at the ISS in The Hague, in the 1970's-80's. And I look forward to a consideration of whether or not either democracy of self-management can be advanced today without a continuing relationship with the social movements and socially-engaged social thinkers as are today increasingly addressing themselves to both the increasing attacks on both and the increasing new wave of experiments and reflections on such – whether in the Old West, the Old East and the Old South. If this formulation suggests that these distinctions between world socio-economic areas are indeed 'old', then the implication might be that suggested by Hyman:*

*'What is required is nothing less than a multinational liberation struggle!'*

## References

Note : Gerard Kester's own sole or co-authored writings are highlighted in red.

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