

## 16 Theses on the Anticapitalist Left in Europe

1. During the past decades the forces of capital have been on the offensive against the forces of labor. Mass lay-offs and the rise in unemployment rates undermined the bargaining power of labor unions. Successive waves of privatizations helped roll back previous gains by labor. Pension systems have been reformed; welfare state provisions have been reduced and essential public services have been privatized. The internationalization of capital and the lowering of trade barriers have resulted in constant pressures for reductions in wages and social protection in advanced capitalist social formations. The organization of capitalist production has been restructured and new forms of flexible production systems have been introduced that lead to enhanced control by capital and pressure for higher labor productivity. Educational systems have been adjusted to the capitalist requirement for a multi-skilled and disciplined labor force. There has been an attack on democratic liberties and a tendency towards a more aggressive form of authoritarian statism, helped by the ideological projection of imperialist aggression as a disciplinary paradigm.

2. But class struggle never ends and large segments of the working class have not given up all their expectations and insist on their demand for social justice. These expectations and demands continue to fuel social unrest and form a barrier to the full implementation of the strategy of capitalist restructuring. There have been many examples of this social dynamic during the past years:

- The big demonstrations that marked the emergence of the movement against capitalist globalization
- The world-wide mobilization against the imperialist war in Iraq
- The rejection of the European Constitution at the referendums in France and Holland.
- Recent major social struggles, both by labor movements and student movements, the most important being the massive and victorious movement of French youth and labor that resulted in the withdrawal of the "First Employment Contract" (CPE).

But hope also comes from outside Europe. First, from Latin America that once again emerges as a "hot zone" with mass popular movements openly challenging American Imperialism. But also from Asia where the revolutionary effort of the Communists in Nepal (and in a lesser but nonetheless important extent communist inspired movements in India), shows that victorious revolutionary struggle remains an open historical possibility.

3. Against this background the forces of capital make the choice of an even more aggressive stance against labor. On the one hand, we have the effort, especially from US neoconservatives, for an increasingly aggressive military interventionism. On the other, we have a new offensive against any remaining rights in the workplace. The nodal point of this offensive is the expansion of labor flexibility and mobility. This is not just 'labor market liberalization', or the introduction of part- and flexi-time arrangements, but a much more profound set of changes that not only deteriorate labor relations and the balance of force in the workplace, but also aim at altering the very notion of work and its ideological representation. In this sense we can even talk about an emerging new "ontology of labor" based on flexibility, temporariness and insecurity. There is an effort to undermine any sense of permanent and secure employment and to undo any barriers to the power of bosses, in order for the workers to believe that there is no possible way of effective collective resistance. And this concerns not just the 'periphery' of the labor market and all forms of unskilled employment where flexibility has been the norm for years, but also all forms of employment that are based on increased education and qualifications, the core of the modern multi-skilled 'post-fordist' workforce. It is a new paradigm of work with greater skills and productivity, but less rights and gains.

4. And this aggressive policy has not been the work only of conservative, liberal or Christian-democratic parties. In many countries, including Greece, the social democracy has been the driving political force for many of the above policies. That is why social-democratic parties, beginning with Tony Blair's New Labour, have refused any reference to social justice, choosing instead to be the vanguards of capitalist restructuring.

5. It is in this sense that we must make an assessment of the political importance of victorious movements such as the recent revolt of French youth and workers. They show that these policies can be defeated in their very core and that broad mass movements can successfully resist and reject this new paradigm of work and society. If we also

take into account the rejection of the European Constitution, then we can speak about a small, but nonetheless important rupture in current neoliberal hegemony.

**6.** But there is always the possibility that these social dynamics can be reversed, unless they are transformed into a political dynamic as well. Contrary to the various versions of spontaneism and/or economism, we insist that it is in the political level that the contradictions from all instances of the social whole are condensed. The current strategy of capital cannot be overturned, unless we have a plausible political project for the restructuring of the Left as a social and political force that challenges capitalist relations of exploitation and oppression, and as the political expression of a popular anticapitalist social alliance. Otherwise, the dynamic of social struggles will just lead to an alternation of bourgeois governments, that will more or less try to implement the same policies.

**7.** It is against this social and political background that we must assess the different projects for the Left that have been proposed: First, we believe that the limits of the anti-neoliberal front strategy have been made obvious. The problem with this political logic was that it considered that the minimal demands of defensive social struggles against aggressive capitalist policies could also form the basis of a left-wing political program and strategy. Equally mistaken has been its insistence on the possibility of an anti-neoliberal government that would open the way for the Left and social movements, because it ignores that any government that takes up the task of managing the capitalist state in the end has to comply with the current strategy of capital (a strategy which is actually articulated as such within the State mechanism). The limit of the anti-neoliberal front strategy is the *anyone-but-* strategy, which either is unsuccessful, as it was the case with the anyone-but-Bush strategy of segments of the US Left, or leads to political and ideological unease, as it is the case with the decision of Rifondazione Comunista to support a representative of capital for prime minister in Italy. We must also stress that this strategy is also based on misrecognition of the role of social-democratic parties. Social democracy nowadays is not a current of the Left but a bourgeois political force with very few, if any, differences with conservative, liberal or christian-democratic parties. We must also remember that social democratic parties and politicians not only are responsible for policies in favour of capital but also for in favor of the internationalization of capital (we should not forget for example that the whole project of European Integration was designed mainly by socialists like J. Delors).

**8.** But a necessary line of demarcation must also be drawn with other currents of the Left. The experience of the 'plural Left' in France, where the Communist Party found itself in the position of being co-responsible for the implementation of capitalist restructuring policies, the gradual distancing of Rifondazione Comunista from anti-capitalist policies, and the fact that in Greece the Synaspismos (Coalition of the Left) still considers the possibility of a future cooperation with the socialist party, PASOK, in the form of a "progressive majority", all these attest to the limits of reformist parties and tendencies. The same goes with the political orientation of the Party of the European Left that rejects anticapitalism, aims only at modest reforms and accepts European Unification, even though it is an aggressive capitalist strategy. That is why we cannot see much difference between the prospect of a "government of the left" and socialdemocratic proposals of "centre-left" unity and "neoliberalism with a human face". And that is why we insist that any project for an anticapitalist left must begin with the premise that the position of the Left for the current conjuncture should be that of a social and political opposition. It is on the basis of the above that we believe it is misleading to talk as if there is only one and basically unitary Left. There is not only one Left, and there is still the necessity of drawing a line of demarcation with all varieties of reformism. We disagree with proposals for a possible recomposition of the whole Left, with radical left tendencies playing the part of a pressure group. We equally disagree with the logic that because of the crisis of reformism, it is the radical left that will offer political strategy and this will combine with the reformist left-wing parties' access to the popular masses. First, in all these varieties of "unity of the Left" it is the reformist strategy that will prevail. Secondly, in many cases even the envisaged access to the popular masses will not be accomplished because reformist parties have lost many of their former ties to the working classes.

**9.** It is in this sense that the time has come for a critical reevaluation of the whole 'Social Forum' strategy. And we are not talking only about the open hegemony of socialdemocratic tendencies in the "World Social Forum". We are also talking about the fact that the European Social Forum has not proven to be the "movement of movements", but

has mainly been a laboratory for the development of neo-socialdemocratic and reformist projects, has been used as a form of legitimization for social democratic parties (the same parties that implement the policies that we all fight against) and has not led to the emergence of an effective strategy for a modern revolutionary left. That is why think that the time has come for self-criticism from all these tendencies of the European anticapitalist Left that have supported the 'Social Forum' strategy.

**10.** We think that the necessary unity of the fighting masses within the movement, as part of a more general effort towards a higher level of class unity of the forces of labor, cannot be translated politically into cooperation with the social-democratic and reformist tendencies. On the contrary, faced with the complete transformation of social democracy into a party of capital, and the absence of any viable alternative from the forces of left-wing reformism, there is no other choice but the political and ideological independence of the revolutionary left, the effort to make it stand out as distinct political point of reference. Even if large segments of the electorate of the Left tend to support projects of unity of the left (both radical and reformist), we should try and make clear that however necessary forms of unity in the struggle are, there are still great differences between an anticapitalist and a reformist position, and this does not concern only the distant future, but also the ability to organize struggles. Only an anticapitalist position can offer that political independence that can lead to uncompromising fight to the end.

**11.** That is why we believe that the time has come for the elaboration of a different political project for the revolutionary left. Such a project should try to deal with the complexity of the crisis of the communist movement, reinstate a new dialectic of theory and practice and step by step make possible the reemergence of the Left as a counter-hegemonic force.

**12.** The material basis of such a project can be no other than a true "turn towards the masses", a systematic and coordinated effort for victorious social struggles. Without tangible every-day gains and victories, without a real change in the balance of force in the workplace, there can be no renewed workers' confidence of the workers in the power of collective struggle, and they will not be persuaded about the necessity of political militancy and revolutionary struggle. It is only through effective and successful struggles that the possibility of an anticapitalist social alliance comes forth, even in the elementary form of solidarity and common demands. And this "turn towards the masses", is something beyond simple catchwords and refers to the elaboration of a new form of militant unionism that would overcome the limits of the current business- and government-friendly trade unionism represented especially by the Confederation of European Trade Unions. This means the effort to revive unions, to create unions where they do not exist, to create new forms of collective representation in areas of temporary and precarious work, to find ways for the autonomous expression of radical left wing union tendencies instead of fruitless efforts of "entryism" in union bureaucracies.

**13.** At the same time, a collective effort is necessary for the elaboration of these political forms that will indeed help the revolutionary left emerge as a distinct political current. And any talk of political forms, necessary leads to the question of the Party. Today, we are not only faced with the results of the crisis of revolutionary strategy that followed the exhaustion of soviet marxism and the inability of revolutionary currents that emerged after 1968 to provide an alternative. We must also deal with the fact that today the political, ideological and social ingredients of the Party exist in disperse form, in various groups, collectivities and initiatives, in various struggles and collective experiences. That is why no current, national or international, can say that it solely is the vanguard or the foundation of a new revolutionary party. On the contrary we believe that the only possible strategy is that of democratic forms of political unity of the radical and revolutionary left. The democratic radical left front, as a political form based not on the consensus of tendencies or political groups, but on its own democratic forms of discussion and decision that involve militants in all levels, is the only way to accumulate the necessary conditions, political, ideological and social that will make the revolutionary party an historical possibility. The emergence of a culture of democratic dialogue will help make these forms of political unity laboratories for a revolutionary Left strategy. It is in this sense of political experimenting that it makes sense today to insist on the Leninist emphasis on the workers' party as an indispensable prerequisite for an effective challenge against capitalist relations of exploitation and oppression. Otherwise, talk about "building the Party" becomes just another expression for sectarianism.

**14.** But this means that these forms of unity are not based only on immediate political objectives, but also open up the discussion for a possible anticapitalist program. Because if we want the Left to emerge again as a counter-hegemonic force, we must be able to persuade broad popular masses that “things can work otherwise”, that it is possible to envisage a non-capitalist functioning of society. But this elaboration of the program cannot take place in the abstract. It must take into account the very experience of the struggles, the demands articulated in the context of these struggles, the opinion of the militants.

**15.** And this sort of programmatic elaboration will necessarily be complex and contradictory, and will demand new and original answers. There is no sense in hoping to “go by the book” (even if we refer to the Collected Works of Marx and Lenin). That is why we disagree with efforts to base projects for the unity of radical left-wing organizations on historical currents of the communist left. We do not underestimate the importance of all the historical ruptures with economism, productivism, statism and reformism and we do not choose historical amnesia or agnosticism (because this usually leads to the repetition of old mistakes). But if the force of capitalism has been its ability to adjust in every conjuncture, the force of the communist movement must be its ability to follow the changes of capitalism and to learn from its own mistakes. And in the sense any opportunity to discuss the experiences of different struggles in various social formations, any step towards a national and international dialogue of the radical left is more than welcome; it is necessary.

**16.** And this brings us to the question of internationalism. The very form of the European Social Forum tends to project an image of a possible pan-european or even global coordination and there have been voices describing it as a new International. We disagree with this position. First of all we do not think that there is ‘ready-made’ project applicable to every social formation, and any revolutionary strategy must be specific to each social formation. Secondly, the development of class struggle in the imperialist chain is necessarily uneven and tends to take different forms, Thirdly, we do not think that the European Union is some sort of supra-national State that makes it necessary to form pan-european parties, and we still think it is important to fight for the withdrawal of each country from the EU. Fourthly, however important solidarity and international coordination are, we believe that our basic internationalist duty is to try and destabilize our own link in the imperialist chain, since that might have destabilizing effects on the whole imperialist chain.

*To sum up: we believe that important social struggles and political battles present true historical opportunities for the refounding of the revolutionary Left as a counter-hegemonic force and as a distinct political current, able not only to change the balance of force within the Left itself, but also to help the very dynamic of popular struggles. Efforts to subordinate the radical Left to some sort of ‘Centre-Left management’ will not only lead to missed opportunities but also to future defeats.*

### **Let’s open up the discussion**

***For an anticapitalist social alliance***

***For a democratic front of the radical left***

***For a radical left program***

### **Let’s insist on communism as an historical possibility**

***Αριστερή Ανασύνθεση***  
***Left Re-composition***

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