

On Contemporary Revolutionary Strategy - From Resistance to Hegemony: The Struggle Against Austerity and the Need for a New Historical Bloc

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Contents

- [Conjuncture of the Global](#)
- [Austerity and European Integra](#)
- [Internal Devaluation](#)
- [Hegemonic Crisis](#)
- [Collective Subject of Resistan](#)
- [Contemporary Revolutionary](#)
- [Moving Beyond Economic Demands](#)

Austerity has been the main battle cry on the part of the forces of capital. New cuts in public spending, new cuts in pensions, new cuts in social expenditure, mass lay-offs of public sector workers, all in the name of dealing with increased budget deficits and increased debt-burden. This was intensified after the eruption of the global capitalist crisis in 2007-08. All over the world, political and economic elites along with media pundits have been singling out public spending as the main obstacle to economic recovery. Deficit reductions have become the point of condensation of political conflicts and party rivalries. The call for budget cuts and deficit reductions has been accompanied by new calls for abolishing whatever has been left of labour rights. In all advanced capitalist societies, we can hear the same battle cry against the supposed 'rigidities' of the labour market and the 'privileges' enjoyed by public sector employees and certain segments of the workforce. Liberalizing markets and removing obstacles to entrepreneurial activity have been at the centre of political debates and policy discussions. The attempt to save the banking system has led to massive transfusion of public funding from socially useful directions toward banks, leading in a massive redistribution of income toward capital.[1]

The intensity of this attack depends upon the particular conjuncture of every economy, but also upon the extent of previous 'reforms' and austerity policies. There is an obvious difference in the extent of and scope of the attack in the U.S. and European Union and in particular the countries of the Eurozone. In contrast to the incompleteness of any attempt toward a 'welfare State' in the 20th century in the U.S., along with the extent and depth of the attack against workers after the late 1970s, things were different in the European Union. In Europe, despite the effects of forced market liberalization, privatizations and labour market reforms, there were still some social gains and rights in place, which European capitalists regard as an obstacle to profitability. The country that seems to have suffered less during the period of the crisis, in terms of recession, Germany, is also the country that was the first to impose aggressive measures of austerity, real wage reductions and increased flexibility, in the first half of the 2000s, under social-democratic governments.[2]

Conjuncture of the Global Capitalist Crisis

Moreover, we cannot think about contemporary austerity policies without reference to the particular conjuncture of the global capitalist crisis that erupted in the 2007-08. There has been a vast literature on a potential Marxist interpretation of the crisis, and it is beyond the scope of this presentation to enter into this debate.[3] However, it is obvious that it was never simply a banking crisis, nor was it simply the result of lack of regulation of financial markets or of lack of prudence in public spending. Rather it was:

(a) The condensation of the crisis of the regime of accumulation, which became dominant after the monetarist, neoconservative and neoliberal counter-revolution launched in the 1980s. This regime of accumulation was based upon mass devaluation of fixed capital and unemployment in the first phase, violent changes in the balance of forces with labour, workplace flexibility, introduction of new technologies, trade and capital flows liberalization, and increased financialization of the economy. This led not only to the growth of money and capital markets but also to a very particular form of capitalist aggression based upon the demand of quick profits and returns on capital.

(b) The crisis of neoliberalism as a political strategy, dominant ideology and hegemonic discourse, since it was more than obvious than free markets instead of being automatic mechanisms of economic rationality, are in reality intrinsically irrational and prone to exacerbating catastrophic economic trends.

(c) Finally, it was a crisis of globalization. All the imbalances of the global system came forward along with the systemic violence of international money and capital markets.

All these imply that we have been witnessing not a conjunctural deterioration of the economic situation but a much more profound crisis of an entire social and economic paradigm. Consequently, the exit from such a crisis requires the implementation of a new social, economic and technological paradigm aiming at guarantying sustained accumulation and profitability. However, this is not a technical question; it is a question of the balance of forces in the class struggle.

Until now, the forces of capital have not presented a new social and technological paradigm. They have presented austerity as not only an attempt toward boosting profitability, but also as a political strategy for changing the balance of forces by means of a 'fuite en avant' tactic of an even more aggressive neoliberal measures.

Austerity and European Integration

Of particular importance is the situation in the Eurozone. Austerity and aggressive neoliberalism have been the main characteristics of the 'European Integration' process from the beginning, exemplified in the deficit and debt limits incorporated in the Maastricht Treaty as criteria for acceptance into the Eurozone. The Eurozone as a monetary and institutional construction also has a disciplinary aspect. It is as if economic problems come from a lack of discipline, an inability to conform to the requirements of sound economic management, an inability to have an actual capitalist spirit. This was even more urgent since despite the extent of neoliberal reforms EU countries since the 1990s important aspects of the European 'social model' and aspects of a 'welfare state' remained in place. Moreover, despite the ambitious declaration of the Lisbon strategy at the beginning of the 2000s, in reality, the European Union lagged in comparison to its competitors in most benchmarks. Therefore, for the dominant elites in the European Union the conjuncture of the economic crisis offered the opportunity to use the need for immediate crisis measures as a means to

impose this violent change in economic and social paradigm.[4]

The construction of the Eurozone, designed as it was with a view in monetary stability, was at the same time one of the most aggressive attempts at creating an environment that that would facilitate not only a more expansive market but also interstate trade and capital flows. Participation in the Eurozone means that a country cedes certain forms of sovereignty – in particular monetary sovereignty – and undertakes an obligation to lower most protective barriers against foreign competition. Moreover, a member state of the European Union accepts the priority of European legislation and directives in most major aspects of economic and social policy, from budget restrictions to forced privatizations. This means that a country that enters the European Union is subject to constant pressure to adjust to a particular and aggressively neoliberal social and economic model. Since 2013, as part of the turn toward ‘European Economic Governance,’ there are even formal penalty mechanisms in place for countries exceeding deficit targets and supervision mechanisms regarding the budget performance of member states.

Proponents of European integration might suggest that this has not been the case and that the process toward ‘European Union’ included at the beginning progressive aspects such as European cooperation and peace and the possibility of redistributive measures to counter regional imbalances. However, I would like to insist that ever since the Single European Act of 1986 and the beginning of the process that led to the Maastricht Treaty the embedded neoliberalism of European integration has been more than evident.[5]

The introduction of the euro as a single currency, controlled by a supranational Central Bank, in an economic area marked by important divergences in productivity and competitiveness, offered an extra comparative advantage to the high productivity and competitiveness countries of the European core, as part of an imperialist strategy. However, it was also the choice of the economic and political elites of European periphery countries, who thought of this exposure to increased competition without protective barriers as a means of inducing capitalist restructuring and modernization and of using, to that end, the legitimizing appeal to the ‘European road.’

This kind of monetary union between countries, which diverge to such extent in terms of productivity and competitiveness, could only create imbalances. Initially, this could be tolerated because of the flow of relatively cheap credit to fuel consumer spending and property bubbles. However, in a period of global economic crisis and subsequent recession it could only make things worse. Especially, it made the debt crisis even worse, since on top of increased indebtedness because of recession there was increased indebtedness in order to cover trade and current account imbalances. Moreover, the very mechanism of the Eurozone and the fact that the euro is a single currency not a national currency meant that countries could find themselves in a situation of nominal insolvency, creating the condition for serious forms of sovereign debt crisis.[6]

The probability that European countries could find themselves in a condition of sovereign default meant that some of intervention was necessary, from the part of the European Union. However, it was never simply about offering a bailout against default, in the form of European solidarity. Rather, the sovereign debt crisis of Greece, but also of Ireland, Spain and Portugal, offered a unique opportunity to experiment with a version of ‘shock therapy’ and a new and original form of imposed reduced sovereignty.

That is why from the beginning bailout loans were linked to the infamous ‘Memoranda of Understanding,’ which were in fact aggressive and all encompassing ‘structural adjustment programs.’ Bailout loans were conditional upon implementation of the measures included in the Memoranda. These, in their turn, covered all aspects of social and economic policy. The inclusion of the IMF in both financing but, above all, to the design and supervision of the whole process was far

from accidental given its 'expertise' in implementing extremely violent policies of privatization and dismantling of social rights.

That is why what we have experienced since 2010 has not been simply an attempt toward 'saving economies' from default, but an aggressive disciplinary attempt toward a novel form of neoliberal social engineering. A look at the programs and austerity packages imposed upon Greece, and to a lesser extent to countries such as Portugal, Spain and Ireland, offers examples of the strategic character of austerity packages.[7]

Internal Devaluation

In theoretical terms, chief IMF economist Olivier Blanchard expressed this in an article from 2006-07 as a strategy of internal devaluation, first designed for Portugal facing its stagnation after the entrance to the Eurozone.[8] According to this strategy, since member-states of the European Union cannot use traditional methods of restoring competitiveness such as currency devaluation, they have to lower both real and nominal wages and change their institutional framework, in order to be competitive in a single currency area and see increased exports. Internal devaluation was never simply about lowering nominal and real wages; it was also about changing the social landscape in all aspects of social production and reproduction.

The idea was to try to impose a form of a shock therapy for European Union countries, a form of aggressive social engineering, an attempt to impose a different social paradigm. It is perhaps one of the most aggressive attempts toward a bourgeois counter-revolution in a period of a crisis of neoliberalism as strategy. One might even say that in certain aspects the disciple (the European Union) attempts to be more aggressive than the master (the IMF) is.

In the case of Greece but also in the case of the other austerity packages imposed with the participation of the European Union one could see a political motivation well beyond simply dealing with public spending and putting public finances back in order. It was as if they were waiting for an opportunity to impose a change in the balance of forces and a set of structural changes well beyond simply dealing with debt. This was obvious in the violent imposition of wage competitiveness, in the almost complete deleting of a century of labour law, in mass privatizations, in using OECD 'policy' recommendations such as the infamous 'OECD toolkit' for market liberalization,[9] in abolishing collective bargaining, in enabling, for the first time after many decades, the mass lay-offs of civil servants.

The strategic character of these structural adjustments, this attempt toward neoliberal social engineering, which aimed at much further than simply dealing with the debt crisis, is more than evident. It is also important to stress that in technical terms, regarding the debt crisis, the austerity programs only made things worse. This is the case especially with the Greek crisis, where the combination between bailout loans, extreme austerity, and structural changes in fact even made the debt crisis worse. Since 2010, Greece has plunged into a vicious circle of austerity, recession, unemployment and debt, without precedent, compared in terms of economic and social consequences only to the Great Depression of the 1930s. Total recession from 2008 to 2013 has been close to 25 per cent, and today in 2014 Greece is still in recession, unemployment is more than 27 per cent, youth unemployment is at almost 60 per cent, real wages are down by more than 25 per cent.[10] Moreover, recessionary tendencies have prevailed in the Eurozone, exactly because of austerity policies. However, European economic and political elites have been ready to tolerate recession and its costs, in return for the actual change in the class balance of forces induced by the austerity packages.

At the same time, this violent and aggressive neoliberal policy has led to a profound political crisis. Elements of a looming political and even hegemonic crisis are evident all over Europe, especially since the dominant policy response has been a mixture of neoliberalism with extreme authoritarianism and disregard for democracy along with – in some cases – neo-conservatism or even incorporating aspects of the Far-Right agenda. There is also a strategic dimension to this hegemonic crisis. The crisis of neoliberalism as hegemonic discourse, strategy and ‘methodology’ means that the bourgeoisies of Europe are within the contours of the conjuncture incapable of offering a coherent positive hegemonic discourse and narrative.

Hegemonic Crisis

The political crisis reached the intensity of a hegemonic crisis in those countries where there were forms of collective struggle and resistance.[11] We must also link this to the evidences of a global change in what concerns protest and contention movements. Since 2010 (or 2008 if we are going to include December 2008 as a ‘postcard from the future’), it is evident that we have entered, on a global scale, into a new phase of social and political contestation, a phase with a certain insurrectionary quality. From the struggles in Greece since 2010, to the Arab Spring and from various student movements (Britain, Chile, Canada) the Indignados movement and Occupy and more recently to the Gezi Park protests in Turkey, this new quality in mass protests is more than evident.[12] Of particular importance during this cycle has been the fact we see not only struggles and resistance but also symbolic and actual forms of recreating forms of popular unity, during the protest movements themselves. This new form of unity and common identity between different segments of the forces of labour and other subaltern classes is of high importance. It accentuated the political crisis, facilitated tectonic shifts in relations of political representation and in certain cases helped certain forms of political radicalization. Moreover, it also created alternative forms of public sphere and helped the open questioning of crucial politics. Consequently, it intensified the political crisis and the crisis of political representation to the intensity of hegemonic crisis. The fact that in countries such as Greece there is the open possibility of the Left reaching political power cannot be explained without reference to exactly this aspect of a hegemonic crisis.

All these pose great political challenges. If austerity today, as a strategic attempt toward a violent change in social paradigm, can also intensify the political crisis and even lead to a hegemonic crisis, it is obvious that the challenge is well beyond simply resisting austerity. What is needed is strategy for hegemony, a strategy for power and a radical alternative. The Left has not the luxury of simply being the most active part of the resistance movement.

Therefore, such return to a politics of strategy from the part of the Left calls for a strategic answer to neoliberalism. This means that we think not simply in terms of movements, but also of social alliances and the level of an entire society, of a strategy for political power, of a program of social transformation. In sum, it requires a leap in terms of both scale and scope of left-wing politics.

That is why I suggest that we must think in terms of a potential new historical bloc, the articulation between a social alliance, a political program and new forms of organization. In my reading, Antonio Gramsci’s notion of the ‘historical bloc’ – historical bloc refers to a strategic not a descriptive or an analytical concept.[13] It defines not an actual social alliance, but a social and political condition to be achieved. Historical bloc does not refer to the formation of an electoral alliance or to the various social strata and movements fighting side by side. It refers to the emergence of a different configuration within civil society, namely to the emergence, on a broad scale, of a different forms of politics, different forms of organization, alternative discourses and narratives, that materialize the ability for society to be organized and administrated in a different way. At the same time it refers to

a specific relation between politics and economics, namely to the articulation not simply of demands and aspirations but of an alternative social and economic paradigm. Therefore, a new historical bloc defines that specific historical condition when not only a new social alliance demands power but is also in a position to impose its own particular economic form and lead society. It also includes a particular relation between the broad masses of the subaltern classes and new intellectual practices, along with the emergence of new forms of mass critical and antagonistic political intellectuality, exactly that passage from knowledge to understanding and passion. Regarding political organizations, it refers to that particular condition of leadership, in the form of actual rooting, participation, and mass mobilization that defines an 'organic relation' between leaders and led – which when we refer to the politics of proletarian hegemony implies a condition of mass politicization and collective elaboration. It also implies the actuality of the new political and economic forms, and the full elaboration of what can we can define as 'dual power' conceived in the broadest sense of the term.

Regarding social alliances, it is important to note that austerity measures, especially the extremely violent attempts at changing the social model, bring closer different social strata in terms of deterioration of working and living conditions and increased insecurity, indebtedness and precariousness. In particular, they bring closer those people in precarious manual low-end manufacturing, service or clerical posts to the better educated segments of the workforce, which previously might have been more attached to an ideological support of aspects of the neoliberal strategy. Moreover, the mass collective practices also tend to unite those segments of the working-class that were active in movements to those segments that have had no experience of collective struggle.

At the same time, youth is at the epicentre of the attack: increased youth unemployment; neoliberal educational reforms that lead to the commodification of education, to increased student debt burden and to reduced upward mobility; introduction of special reduced wages for youths.[14] One might that all these turn the youth of today into a 'lost generation.'

Collective Subject of Resistance

However, as we have already noted, this is not simply a sociological trend; the important *differentia specifica* in the conjuncture has been a series of mass movements and collective practices of protest and resistance that have brought together all these different segments of the forces of labour, creating material and symbolic forms of popular unity in struggle. One might say that such protests, with their massive displays of strength and their horizontal and democratic character have facilitated the re-invention of the people as a collective subject of resistance, solidarity and transformation, as the alliance of all those women and men who, one way or the other, depend upon selling their labour power in order to survive.

This re-emergence of the people as a collective subject also gives a new dimension to the demand for democracy and popular sovereignty.[15] Current austerity packages also take the form of a perverse erosion of democracy and popular sovereignty. It seems like a move toward a post-democratic condition. In this sense, there is something very important and deeply radical in the demand from democracy coming from contemporary movements. This democratic demand is not simple a demand for more 'deliberation.' In contrast, it is a demand for participation at all levels and deals with the actual exercise of power, the need to impose new forms of democratic social control, the need to make all the important aspects of social and economic policy subject to the collective decision of the forces of labour. This in its turn requires a profound rethinking of what a demand for popular sovereignty means: it means the demand for social transformation and justice based upon collective

decision instead of the contemporary perverse market 'shareholder democracy.'

Moreover, this attempt toward rethinking the very notion of the people as a collective subject of emancipation and transformation is also a way to answer another important challenge, namely the divisive effects of racism within the forces of labour. This reinvention of the peoples as collective subject of struggle, can draw a line of demarcation from nationalism and racism, since instead of 'imagined communities' it is based on actual communities of struggles and resistances, offering possibility of a forging an inclusive common popular identity forged based upon the collective will to live, work and struggle within a particular society. However, this return to reference to the people does not suggest some form of return to a variety of populism or to a form of radical democratic politics detached from class politics.

On the contrary, we can ground this policy of alliance building to basic aspects of the contemporary 'ontology of labour.' Contemporary workforce, despite increased precariousness, fragmentation, new hierarchies, new polarizations, is at the same time more educated, qualified, skilled and with increased alphabetization than any other previous generation. It combines both workplace abilities with communicative and affective skills that can help it articulate its demands and grievances in a more effective way. These collective skills have been more than evident in the communicative and information technologies of contemporary movements, such as the extensive and successful use of the internet and social media. We are talking about a workforce that is in a position to realize its role in the production of social wealth. Moreover, the current neoliberal strategy is to combine increased education, knowledge and skills with increased precariousness with constant attempts to make sure that increased skills, expertise and education do not lead to increased wages or upward mobility. Such a strategy can only intensify this contradiction at the very heart of the reproduction process of the contemporary labour force, especially when austerity and recession mean that it is not possible to compensate for job insecurity and overworking through the promise of debt-fuelled consumerist hedonism. This is one of the most important contradictions traversing contemporary advanced capitalist societies and offers the possibility to ground, in actual terms, a potential socialist and communist political project to important aspects of the contemporary ontology of labour.

This offers the possibility of a new working-class hegemony, a social and political project for the prospect of contemporary societies based upon the directive role of the working class. Today the question facing us is what social forces are going to shape the future of our societies: the forces of capital and in particular finance capital with its violence, cynicism and indifference toward the reality of life of the mass of populations, or the alliance of the forces of labour with all their cognitive, intellectual, affective and creative potential?

At the same time, it would be a mistake to take the current aspects of the composition of the labour force as given and think that they can be directly transformed into a radical political composition. This is the mistake made by many representatives especially of the post-workerist trend that tend to present the current forms of the communicative and affective labour as offering inherently the possibility of radical politics.[16] This would mean that we underestimate the importance of the political forms of constitution of the social and political collective subject of resistance and emancipation. The 'traces of communism' in the collective practices, demands and aspirations of the contemporary labour force go hand in hand with the pervasive effects of fragmentation, insecurity, precariousness, along with various forms of ideological miscognition. Therefore, whether these potentialities can take a particular radical and anti-capitalist political form or not is a political stake, it needs a political intervention, it requires a conscious attempt to intensify political contradictions, it has to be combined with stressing particular political exigencies, it forces us to face the question of political organization. It is not and it could never be an unmediated process in sharp contrast to spontaneist traditions.

Moreover, it is also important to stress we should not take this potential new radicalization as given. In reality, it is a stake of political and ideological class struggles. The current rise of the Far-Right in Europe either in the form of populist conservative right wing 'euroscepticist' parties or in the form of openly neo-fascist or neo-nazi movements such as Greece's Golden Dawn exemplifies this tendency. Today, the rise of the Far-Right, bring forward a challenge that the Left cannot avoid facing. Without an attempt toward collective resistances and re-creating popular unity from below, individualized anger and despair can be turned into reactionary and socially cannibalistic racist, sexist and ultra-conservative directions.

Especially in Europe, this tendency has been fuelled by the inability of important tendencies of the European Left to offer a critique of European Union and an alternative to 'European integration.' This left open the space for the Far-Right to exploit, despite its mainly systemic and pro-business orientation, the anxiety of large segments of the subaltern classes regarding the developments within the European Union. That is why a 'euroscepticism of the Left' is more than necessary than ever. Having a clear position against the European Union and in favour of exiting the Eurozone and the treaties of the European Union is the necessary condition to fight against the embedded neoliberalism of the European Union and to transform anxiety and anger into resistance, solidarity and collective struggle.[17]

Any attempt toward a confrontation with questions of strategy, this also entails dealing with the question of power. On this question is important to stress the following point: today the traditional mechanism of social protest is no longer in place. It is not possible for movements to wage struggles and achieve compromises. Nor is it possible to think in terms of the movement pressuring bourgeois governments in progressive reforms. In a post-democratic condition, governments do not think in terms in political cost. Moreover, the preferred solution by both EU and the IMF, is coalition governments, not voted by anyone, but constructed after elections. Therefore, it is impossible to have change and an answer to austerity, simply in terms of movements pressuring governments. Without a political break, without gaining political power, it is impossible to fight austerity, reverse these aggressive forms of neoliberal social engineering and open up the road for a project of social emancipation and transformation.

However, thinking in terms of political power does not mean thinking simply in terms of a change of government. Nor does it mean a smooth transition process strictly within the limits of existing legality. It means a process of breaks and transformations, and radical reforms, which in some cases also means a constituent process of changes and radical reforms in legislation, including the basic aspects of contemporary constitutions, which increasingly tend to constitutionalize austerity, private investment and international trade liberalization agreements. Moreover, especially in the case of the European Union, with its embedded neoliberalism, it also means disobeying EU treaties and regulations that are part of the constitutional framework of member states.

Moreover, if it is not possible to think of political power simply in terms of government power, we still need a strong movement. Without a strong movement from below, without forms of popular power from below, of self-organization, and self-defence, any government of the Left will be, in reality, weak and unable to answer the pressures and blackmails from the part of international markets and organizations. We must never forget that the class character of contemporary states is deeply rooted in the very materiality of their institutions, forms of decision making, knowledge process, however traversed they are by class struggles. There are going be strong resistances and obstacles from the judicial system, the coercive state apparatuses, segments of the state bureaucracy, especially the 'specialists' and 'technocrats' dealing with the facilitation of 'investment.'

Consequently, the Left can never be a 'normal' party of government. It will always be in a

necessarily contradictory relation to the State. That is why it can never simply have a government policy. It must always be based upon mass movements and at the same time trying to impose a profound transformation of state apparatuses.[18] There would be a necessary asymmetry between real political power (in large part in the hands of the bourgeoisie) and governmental power, an asymmetry that can be only countered by forms of popular from below.

We must think of political power in terms of a contemporary version of a 'dual power' strategy. This would combine a strategy for governmental power and at the same time for political power from below, in a constant process of pressure toward enlargement of the transformation process, toward even more radical measures, toward dealing with all the counterattacks from the part of the forces of capital. This process must be a constant dialectic between initiatives from below, forms of counter-power and attempts of institutionalizing forms of enlarged democracy, worker's control and democratic planning. This process must be seen as a process of constant struggle, of continuous battle against various forms of obstacles and of collective experimentation based upon the collective ingenuity of the people in struggle.

Contemporary Revolutionary Strategy

This means that we start again thinking what a contemporary revolutionary strategy might look like.[19] If we can start rethinking in terms of a potential hegemonic crisis, if we can see forms of insurrectionary collective practices, if we can detect tectonic shifts in terms of political and electoral trends and relations of representation, then it is necessary to think again in terms of revolutionary strategy. We cannot think about it in terms of ideal types and catch phrases coming from the relevant literature. This attests to the need to actual open the debate on strategy. Not only in the sense of going back to old debates, such as the 4th Congress of the 3rd International and the whole debate on Worker's government, or the attempt of Gramsci to rethink the United Front strategy in terms of a war of position for hegemony.[20] But also, to try and learn from experience, both negative and positive, the successes and the shortcomings of contemporary experiences such the attempts in left-wing governance in Latin America, and, naturally the experiences, coming from contemporary mass movements, both of their upsurges but also of their downturns.

Regarding demands and political programs, we cannot think in terms of simply rejecting austerity measures. We must think in terms of radical alternatives, new social configurations, and new forms to make things work. This means thinking in terms of a new socialist alternative. The very intensification of the contradictions of the neoliberal strategy and choice of an even more aggressive neoliberalism means that the distance between urgently needed responses to social disaster and socialist strategy is diminished. For example it is impossible to counter an unemployment rate of 27-28 per cent without a sharp increase in public spending plus forms of self-management plus an increased role of the public sector, plus - in order to achieve the above - nationalization of banks and strategic enterprises and reclaiming monetary sovereignty. However, all these are also first steps toward a socialist strategy.

We need to avoid thinking in terms of people 'not being ready' for radical change. In reality a period of such social crisis along with the extent of collective practices of almost insurrectionary practices is, even in existential terms, a catalytic experience. This means that they are more ready than before to accept radical solutions, in line with the changes already evident in their own lives. This is in sharp contrast to the attitude, from some part of the Left, that people are not radicalized enough, that they prefer changes that seem mainstream that the role of the Left is not to initialize radical changes but at the current conjuncture to save society from humanitarian disaster and then think about socialism. We must think at the same time in terms of resistance and transformation, of

movement and political power, of saving society from humanitarian disaster and opening the way for Socialism in the 21st century.

We can see the same dialectic of immediate demands and strategic transformation around one of the main points of ideological blackmail during the past years in Greece, namely the reference to the danger of energy shortages since an exit from the Eurozone and a potential correction of the rate of exchange might make fuel an energy imports more expensive. This is a potential actual consequence. This in its turn would require different priorities for energy consumption (for example giving priority to mass transportation over private cars) or attempts toward reducing total energy consumption. However, these should not be seen as only temporary. These would also be important aspects of any attempt toward an environmentally sustainable socialist strategy.

Today, some of the necessary steps toward dealing with the consequences of the crisis and in particular the acute humanitarian crisis, such as creating networks of solidarity, elaborating new ways to organize crucial aspects of social life such as health, education, and making sure that everyone has access to a proper meal are not only means to deal with a problem. They are also the learning processes in order to see how things can be organized in a different way.

For example, if we have to deal with ways to offer basic health coverage in conditions of reduced access to medical supplies supplied by the international markets, this is not simply an 'urgent measure.' It is also a learning process about how to organize a different health system based upon prevention and public health provision instead of expensive forms of medical intervention. At the same time, experiments in alternative networks of distribution such as forms of direct access of agricultural products to consumers, are not simply means to deal with an emergency; rather they are experiments into alternative distribution practices, necessary for dealing with problems in an alternative social configuration in an alternative solution to the problem of food sufficiency. If self-management is the only solution to deal with firms closing and works being laid-off, this is not simply a way to deal with unemployment. It is a way to learn how to put in practice a strategy of workers' control and make evident that this is possible and feasible.

Of particular importance is the international dimension of austerity policies. Today a certain degree of exposure to the competitive pressure coming from the global markets is the over-determining factor in austerity policies. Especially in member states of the Eurozone it is impossible to think a way out of institutionalized austerity without a break from the Eurozone. A reclaiming of monetary and economic sovereignty is an integral aspect of any attempt toward a radical alternative. This is not simply a choice of participation in international treaties and organizations. Choices such as whether to be part of the European integration process one can see the condensation of class strategies.

Demands for de-linking from processes of internationalization of capital and from international commodity and money flows have often been presented as a futile exercise in isolation, since it is supposedly impossible to think in terms of self-sufficiency. Others have attacked these positions as 'nationalist' or 'chauvinist.' However, I do not think that any attempt toward socialism for the 21st century can incorporate the current global productive process, where it takes the components of a single commercial product to circle twice the globe before it arrives at the final consumer. Some degree of self-sufficiency, de-centralization and locality are indispensable aspects of any potentially socialist policy.

That is why we need to rethink what internationalism means. Instead of fantasies about a global insurrection or revolution, which in the end easily turn into reformist calls for a more responsible international community, I think that making the crucial social and political rupture in a potentially 'weak link' remains the most important form of internationalism and has the potential to send

tectonic political shifts and create waves internationally. If such a process goes through, then the country that makes the break will not be 'left alone'; it will have the support of movements and peoples in struggle. A strategy for hegemony and a new historical bloc also implies offering a strategy on the international orientation of country and society, of its position in the world, of the forms of relations it can have with other countries, societies and movements. In many instances, it is exactly around such questions, at the intersection of the national and the international dimensions, that we can see the condensation of class strategies. In the case of Greece, any attempt to articulate an alternative to the attachment to the European Integration process, would mean an attempt to rethink the possibility of alliances, forms of economic cooperation, forms of solidarity also toward the broader Balkan area, the Mediterranean etc.

A strategy for a new historical bloc also requires a profound change in ideologies, worldviews and values. Instead of an individualistic consumerist ethos, we need a new collective ethos of solidarity, common struggle, prioritization of real needs. This should not be seen only as an idealist or voluntarist aspiration. It should be an attempt to elaborate upon collective ideological practices and representation that are already present. People that face this kind of austerity and social degradation have been forced by the very condition they are facing to devise of new ways to make ends meet, to rethink their values and priorities to actually appeal to other people for mutual help and support. These are not simply reactions to the situation; they are embryonic forms of alternative forms of social relations.

This can also be in perspective: there are already many 'traces of communism' arising at the margins of capitalist societies (and sometimes not exactly at the margins). There are everyday gestures of solidarity and sociality, that go beyond formal commodity and money mediated relations, and most people have some experiences: helping a friend without asking for something in return, expressing spontaneous solidarity, appreciating the doctor of the teacher that goes beyond his formal duties etc. There are the very moments of struggle, the sharing of resources and emotions during a strike or a mass rally. There are the struggles over public goods and the persisting perception, despite neoliberal ideological campaigns, that some goods are public and beyond commodification. We have the return of the debates on common goods, the various forms of non-commodified goods from free software to alternative distribution networks, the various forms of self-management. All these attest to this constant re-emergence of 'traces' or 'moments' of communism in contemporary societies and struggles.

At the same time, we need to stress another point. These radical measures represent necessary conditions for socialist transformation. One can think of monetary sovereignty, a break from the monetary and institutional framework of the European Union, a break from the constraints imposed by trade liberalization and the need to comply with the free flow of commodities and capital, nationalizations, and putting again in place practices of redistribution of incoming (such as increases in corporate tax and taxation of wealth and off-shore corporations). This process in the end has less to do with macro-economic policy and more with revolutionizing the relations of production, with new forms of self-management, with rethinking democratic planning in a non-statist form, with redefining the priorities of an alternative developmental paradigm.

In this sense, a strategy for a new historical bloc also requires a *new practice of politics*, new social and political forms of organization beyond the traditional Party-form, beyond the limits of traditional parliamentary bourgeois politics. This corresponds exactly to the need for new forms of civil society organizations, in the broad sense that Gramsci gave to this notion.[21]

Both Lenin and Gramsci thought that there can be no process of social transformation without a vast social and political experimentation, both before and after the revolution, which will guaranty that within the struggles we can already witness the emergence of new social forms and new ways to

organize production and social life.

It is not going to be an 'easy road.' It would require a struggling society actually changing values, priorities, narratives. It would also require a new ethics of collective participation and responsibility, of struggle and commitment to change, a transformed and educated *common sense* that becomes 'good sense.' [22] In this sense, the promise of Left-wing politics cannot be a simple return to 2009, not least because it is materially impossible, but because we want to go beyond confidence to the markers and debt-ridden consumerism. In such a 'world-view' public education, public health, public transport, environmental protection, non market collective determination of priorities, and quality of everyday sociality, are more important than imported consumer goods and cheap credit.

"Elaboration of this program necessarily requires the experience and the knowledge coming from struggles, coming from the collective ingenuity of the people in struggle."

Two aspects are crucial: The political program as common radical narrative. It is more than urgent to rethink the very notion of the transition program. We need to find demands that are at the same time urgently needed and opening up the way for radical transformation. This has nothing to do with a theology of the program - in the sense of battles over words and phrases - but at the same time we must not think of the program as simply a set of demands coming from the movement. Nor do we need to fall into some form of "realism" and just search for ways to do things without fundamental changes. We must focus on the main aspects of the current attack and offer alternatives, not only demands, that is present concrete radical proposals on how we can run education, health, infrastructure, on how to finance public spending, on how to achieve food sufficiency, on energy saving in order to reduce dependence from foreign markets etc. Elaboration of this program necessarily requires the experience and the knowledge coming from struggles, coming from the collective ingenuity of the people in struggle. A crucial aspect of every major and prolonged struggle is that people start to think about their sector, their enterprise, their workplace, how it is run, how the decisions that affect them are being taken, how their work can be more socially useful, how resources could be used in more socially useful manner, how destructing the role of 'private enterprise' can be. This can be the starting point of actually thinking alternative social configurations.

The second crucial aspect refers to the form of democratic collective process of decision-making. We need to devise of new forms of democratic processes, from forms of mass democracy from below, to the actual role of unions and assemblies in the shaping of policy, the institutional implementation of forms of participatory planning. We also need to enhance a political ethos of mass participation.

All these require a profound rethinking of the forms of movement and political organization of the movement.

First, we must think of the attempt toward recomposing the Left in terms of a process of recomposing the movement, of a process of actually trying to recompose the social subject of resistance and emancipation. This means turning contemporary dynamics into a sustained return of collective struggle. It also means of rethinking new inclusive forms of social movements beginning by through a rethinking of the very concept of the union, in order to make it able to incorporate the different labour relations, formal and informal, within a sector or an enterprise and to help its rooting not only to employment categories but also communities. This will also mean, new forms of student organization, new forms of solidarity practices, new forms of coordination, and new forms of public spheres. This must also mean actually learning from the experiences of democracy, equal voicing and horizontal coordination within contemporary movements.

Moreover, it would be a mistake to think of political re-composition mainly in terms of electoral

politics or simply party building; without prolonged struggles and resistances, we cannot have that kind of political and ideological displacement and that form of hegemonic crisis that could help the emergence of the Left as a counter-hegemonic force. We cannot think of this shift to the Left as if it were simply a social phenomenon. It is interesting that only in those countries where there was the most enduring social movement, protest and contestation that we have seen the most impressive turn to the Left, Greece being of course the most obvious example. This means that without this kind of mass movement and in particular without extensive forms of collective practices and new forms of organization and new public spheres it is impossible to have that kind of radicalization and politicization that could fuel a new emergence of the Left. Because we must not forget that without this engagement with collective forms of resistance, it is not certain that the reaction to the violent change in living conditions can lead to radicalization. It can also lead to forms of individualized anger and despair and equally individualized strategies for survival, that do not necessarily lead to radicalization: in contrast experience shows that they can also fuel forms of far right, reactionary and racist politics. This tendency has been witnessed in some European countries, Greece also being an example with the rise of Golden Dawn, especially in those segments of the working-class and petty bourgeois strata that have not been part of the movement and have channelled their anger toward the pseudo-radicalism of fascist politics.

Moving Beyond Economic Demands

Rebuilding strong social movements must be combined with rebuilding new forms of political organization. Moreover, the very experience of contemporary movements has shown that political organizations, groups, networks have been more than important for the emergence of movements and their coordination. However, the question of political organization cannot be thought of simply in instrumentalist terms. As Gramsci has shown the crucial aspect of the social and historical process described as 'party' has actually to do exactly with moving beyond economic demands; in a way it represents for a class, or an alliance of classes, exactly the moment of politics.[23]

Consequently, regarding political organization, we must avoid both the traditional form of the small sectarian group, or the 'Leninist party' but also the tendency toward simply electoral coalitions even if this can be a necessary starting point. We need a new conception of the front as a learning process and a laboratory of programs, ideas, political initiatives and mass critical intellectualities, as a way to bring together around a program a wide range of currents, resistances, sensitivities, and experiences of struggle, not just in order to 'connect' them but to transform them and align them around a hegemonic project.[24] It is impossible for such a front to maintain a distance between the leading group, and its reliance to specialists of political communication and the mass of the members of the front who simply have to deal with electoral campaigns. Moreover, we cannot think of political fronts as an endless negotiation between different groups, which attempt to mimic a 'Leninist' model forgetting that the main trace of Lenin was not 'repetition' but radical novelty.[25]

Moreover, we need to think the very complexity and difficulty of recomposing the Left as an anti-capitalist force. At this point, we must stress one crucial point: the elements that can form the Left, or whatever name we would like to use to describe a movement of resistance to neoliberalism, emancipation from exploitation and collective creativity, are today in a disperse form.

They can be found in existing left wing political parties, in union activists, in new intellectuals, in Marxist, scholars, in political organizations, in reviews, in reformist or even social-democratic parties. We must attempt to bring all these elements together and attempt to create a new political synthesis, both in terms of strategy and in terms of different social experiences. This gives a strategic dimension to the Front, the Left front or the United Front, to use the term that is more

appropriate to the communist tradition.

Traditionally, the United Front has been interpreted in terms of a tactical alliance with 'reformists' in order to achieve the unity of the class. I think it was much more than that. It reflected the strategic assumption that we cannot think in terms of the metaphysics of 'one class - its Party.' Rather, we must think in terms of plural expressions and experiences of class politics and, thus, in terms of a politics of articulation this of this kind of 'bloc' through a political process that cannot be other than that of a Front. Therefore, we must assign to the concept of the Front a strategic character. It is not a tactical choice; it is the confrontation with the complex, uneven, over-determined and necessarily plural character of the collective social, political, ideological and theoretical practices of the subaltern classes.

The Front is not the simple 'connection' between different movements and collective experiences. I do not deny the importance of recent discussions on connectivity,[26] but I think we need a more strategic conception of the process of political formation, exactly what the metaphor of the 'laboratory' suggests. I think that we must think of the Front as exactly the laboratory for this process of re-composition, a political process where different experiences, sensitivities, movements, theoretical elaborations, forms, of worker's enquiry can converge, and be articulated, through an encounter with Marxism into political strategy. And when we refer to elaborating and articulating a political strategy we mean:

- the collective elaboration of the political program
- ideological interventions aiming at transforming the 'common sense'
- creating forms of popular unity
- attempting to create something close to a new 'historical bloc'

That is why we must think of radical left parties, political fronts and organizations as knowledge practices and laboratories of new forms of mass critical intellectuality.[27] In a period of economic and political crisis but also of new possibilities to challenge capitalist rule, questions of political organization gain new relevance. Thinking of organization simply in terms of practical or communicative skills for mobilization, or of electoral fronts and tactics is not enough. It would be better, in order to build today's parties and united fronts, to revisit Gramsci's (and Lenin's) conception of the party as a democratic political and theoretical process that produces knowledge of the conjuncture, organic intellectuals, new worldviews, social and political alternatives, as a potential hegemonic apparatus. We need forms of organization that not only enable coordination and networking, democratic discussion and effective campaigning, but also bring together different experiences, combine critical theory with the knowledge coming from the different sites of struggle, and produce both concrete analyses but also mass ideological practices and new forms of radical "common sense."

This, however, has nothing to do with any conception of the Front as simple electoral coalition nor as a 'broad front' that is simply a vehicle for revolutionaries to build parties or to recruit members to the cause.

In this sense, we can say that the Front is in reality 'the Party,' or that the 'Modern Prince' necessarily has to take the form of a United Front, if we think of it as exactly this kind of political and ideological laboratory. Therefore, it is a sign of strategic crisis and incapacity that certain revolutionary tendencies still insist on using contemporary fronts in an instrumental way. I refer to the fact that they tend to treat them as simple means to appeal to the masses, or to recruit members,

whereas they act out the fantasy of being the revolutionary party, with rigid hierarchies and an almost religious conception of political knowledge, expertise and direction. In contrast, we have to understand that it is at the level of the front, in the process of the front, in the struggle for hegemony within it, in the debate about how to assess the lessons from the movement, in the experimentation with different political lines, that we can actually have a process of re-composition. It is there that we should see the process of rebuilding a revolutionary Left and not in the presumed safety of the individual group or even worse sect.

We need to think of contemporary Marxist groups as transitive political forms, as political forms that are going to be superseded. Most of contemporary political organizations bear the marks of a long period of crisis. They are necessarily transitive and provisional. Otherwise, we just reproduce a certain political pathology. Historical legacies are important as reference points or as points of origin, but not as actual guides for action or – even worse – as lines of demarcation.

Fourthly, democracy plays a strategic role within these ‘political laboratories’: we need democracy at all levels, and an open democratic process. This is not simply about people having rights within the party; it is not about some juridical conception of party democracy. It is about the actual possibility of these fronts to be laboratories, to facilitate new syntheses and political compositions, to help the reinvention of political strategy. Democracy implies exactly that we attempt to transform political organizations and fronts into alternative public spheres. Democracy also means dealing with different and even opposing opinions, strategies and tactics. Some of these differences or even oppositions have to be considered as expressions not only of different political lines, but also of different social experiences of different social strata or different movements. In contrast to a certain ‘party-building’ tradition, we want the people from different movements to bring their experiences and exigencies even if this contrasts ‘party lines.’ This means that internal contradictions, debates, and struggles are aspects of a necessary dialectic. Not only they are unavoidable but also it is only through their expression that we can arrive at a correct answer and political line, a line that, in some cases, it would be impossible to conceive in advance. This has also another consequence: there is no point to trying to keep these debates ‘internal.’ If, in the last instances, these contradictions come from the contradictory character of the terrain of class struggle, then the only way to deal with them is through open and democratic discussion and debate.[28]

So what is the responsibility of the anticapitalist Left today? It is not to simply enter ‘broad fronts’ in an attempt to radicalize it ‘from the inside,’ since many experiences suggest that the opposite is more likely. It is not to act as a leftist opposition that builds the ‘revolutionary party’ that will take over when ‘reformists’ fail to deliver the necessary revolutionary changes. The challenge facing us is the following: can the anti-capitalist Left actually attempt to answer the strategic questions posed by the conjuncture? Can it think in terms of strategy, power and hegemony? Can it engage in new forms of a united front?

In sum, thinking about a new historical bloc means thinking both in terms of new inclusive social movements and new left fronts as political laboratories. It comprises both the ability to take the advantage of conjunctures of intensified hegemonic crisis, but also the patient work of realignment and recomposition where the defeat of the labour movement is the prevailing condition. It is, in a way, war of position and war of manoeuvre at the same time, or a contemporary version of a ‘prolonged people’s war.’ It is a way to think urgent exigencies such as the ones we face in Greece but also the difficulties of those struggling within the wilderness of ‘actually existing neoliberalism.’ We must think more strategically, even if we are obliged to act locally or intervene partially.

In sharp contrast to treating, for a relatively long time questions of strategy in theoretical or even philological terms, we have the opportunity to discuss these questions in under the pressure of actual historical exigencies and possibilities. We may feel overwhelmed by the scale of the challenge,

we may feel tragically incapable to deal with it, we may have to deal with open questions and uncharted territory, but no-one ever said that revolutionary politics can be easy. •

Panagiotis Sotiris

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Endnotes:

1. On the centrality of the policies of austerity in contemporary capitalist societies see Schäfer and Streeck (eds.) 2013 and Lapavitsas et al. 2012. For an overview of austerity policies in various countries see Hill (ed.) 2013.
2. Schäfer and Streeck (eds.) 2013.
3. Konings (ed.), 2010; Mavroudeas, 2010; Duménil and Lévy; Mavroudeas, 2010; Duménil and Lévy, 2011; Panitch and Gindin 2012; Lapavitsas 2013.
4. On the crisis of the Eurozone and the response of European economic and political elites see Lapavitsas et al. 2012, Schäfer and Streeck (eds.) 2013.
5. On the embedded neoliberal character of the European Integration process see van Apeldoorn 2002; van Apeldoorn 2013; Cufrany and Ryner (eds.) 2003; Moss (ed.) 2005; Durand (ed.) 2013.
6. On the role of the financial and monetary architecture to the debt crisis see Lapavitsas et al. 2012.
7. Schäfer and Streeck (eds.) 2013.
8. Blanchard 2007. See also Ioakeimoglou 2012.
9. OECD 2014.
10. See data at the Hellenic Statistic Authority (www.statistics.gr), Bank of Greece

(www.bankofgreece.gr) and INE/GSEE the Research Institute of the Confederation of Trade Unions (www.inegsee.gr).

11. On the extent of the hegemonic crisis in Greece see Kouvelakis 2011.

12. On recent movements see Solomon and Palmieri (ed.) 2011; Dean 2012; Douzinas 2013; Sotiris 2013; Rehmann 2013.

13. On this reading see Sotiris 2013a. For Gramsci's references to the historical bloc see Gramsci 1971. The following passage from the Quaderni brings forward the strategic character of the notion of the historical bloc; "If the relationship between intellectuals and people-nation, between the leaders and the led, the rulers and the ruled, is provided by an organic cohesion in which feeling-passion becomes understanding and hence knowledge (not mechanically but in a way that is alive), then and only then is the relationship one of representation. Only then can there take place an exchange of individual elements between the rulers and ruled, leaders [dirigenti] and led, and can the shared life be realised which alone is a social force with the creation of the 'historical bloc'" Gramsci 1971, p. 418).

14. On the strategic character of neoliberal reforms in education see Solomon and Palmieri (eds.) 2011; Sotiris 2012; Fernández, Sevilla, Urbán (eds.) 2013; McGettigan 2013.

15. On this argument see also Sotiris 2011.

16. See for example Hardt and Negri 2000; Virno 2004; Roggero 2010. It is interesting to note that in *Commonwealth* (Hardt and Negri 2009) Negri and Hardt pay more attention to questions of political organization.

17. On this argument see Sotiris 2014.

18. On the argument why the Left cannot be a 'party of government' like bourgeois parties see Althusser 2014. On the necessary dialectic between left governance and movement see Poulantzas 2000.

19. On the recent re-opening of the debate on communism see Douzinas and Žižek (eds.) 2010 and Žižek (ed.) 2013.

20. On these debates see Riddell (ed.) 2012; Thomas 2009.

21. On the importance of a new practice of politics see Balibar 1974 and Althusser 2014.

22. On 'common sense' as a battleground see Rehmann 2013.

23. See Gramsci 1971, 181-2. See also Rehmann 2013.

24. On the notion of the political party as laboratory see Gramsci 1971.

25. On recent debates on the question of organization see Porcaro 2012; Thomas 2013; Sotiris 2013a; Rehmann 2013.

26. On the notion of connectivity see Porcaro 2012a.

27. Gramsci 1971, p. 335.

28. On the need for an acceptance of this kind of contradictions see Althusser 1978.

P.S.

* "From Resistance to Hegemony: The Struggle Against Austerity and the Need for a New Historical Bloc". The Bullet n° 988. 26 May 2014:

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* Panagiotis Sotiris teaches social theory and social and political philosophy at the Department of Sociology of the University of the Aegean. This text is based on a presentation at the Toronto Historical Materialism Conference (8-11 May 2014), and first published on his blog at lastingfuture.blogspot.gr.