

Europe Against Austerity - Report on the London Conference

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The Europe Against Austerity conference on 1 October was attended by 681 people including 150 from outside Britain. This happened the same weekend that two big demonstrations took place. On Saturday in Glasgow, there was the "People First" demonstration of 15,000 called by the Scottish TUC. On Sunday, 35,000 joined the demonstration in Manchester on Sunday outside the Tory Party conference which was called by the TUC and backed by the Coalition of Resistance and the Right to Work Campaign.

The conference adopted a declaration agreeing to establish a network, to plan for a day of action against austerity next year, as well as to call on unions to organise a day of industrial action across Europe. The conference put on the agenda in Britain and across Europe the need for an audit (although that is not in the final declaration) and cancellation of the "illegitimate" debt. It also started a debate in Britain on the European Union and the euro, hopefully drawing it away from a simplistic "No to EU" position, and putting withdrawal from these capitalist institutions as a consequence of our campaign against austerity, rather than as a starting point. It was a serious and sober event which recognised both the scale of the economic crisis and the tasks ahead in escalating the resistance against austerity. Olivier Besancenot for the NPA explained it starkly when saying "We have to find ways of coming together to build this social movement of the people in Europe..... And this isn't a whim or just propaganda, working towards the first general strike in the history of Europe is a duty for political activists in the coming months."

The breadth of representation was impressive as it encompassed most of the anti-neoliberal left (Die Linke, Sinn Fein, European Left Party) and a particularly strong anti-capitalist current (NPA, CADTM, Bloco). Major unions supported the conference such as UNITE, the NUT and the RMT from Britain, Solidaires from France, the teachers union OLME from Greece, and LAB from the Basque country. There were also representatives of the CGTP of Portugal, COBAS of Italy and many others. Particularly noteworthy was Elżbieta Fornalczyk of the Free TU "August 80" representing Tesco workers who outlined the dramatic condition of women in Poland as mothers and workers. Sonia Mitralia of the CADTM in Greece also stressed how the crisis was hitting women harder.

This conference, as well as the demonstrations this weekend, is an excellent springboard for making the November 30 strike by over 20 trade-unions a massive success. We need to mobilise other sections of society not on strike about pensions, but who wish to fight to defend the welfare state. It is also important to mobilise from the conference for European-wide events such as the G20 on 1st November. Congratulations were sent in by many people. Those who travelled from far, such as the 12 CGT, FSU & SUD stewards from Le Havre in France, thought it was interesting and a necessary event for stepping up the resistance across Europe.

Fred Leplat

See also: Olivier Besancenot: ["Working towards the first general strike in the history of Europe is a duty for political activists in the coming months"](#)

P.S.

* From International Viewpoint.

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