

Five considerations on the Alter Summit process

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1. An enigma

Why do political elites apply austerity measures that are

- Socially destructive. These are the greatest social regressions since the war, and even the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe has recently referred to this austerity as a threat against Social Rights and democracy.
- Economically absurd. Austerity increases deficits and debt, and it destroys the productive apparatus, without even offering a way to emerge from the crisis.
- Democratically suicidal. On the one hand, through the authoritarian actions of the Troika that put several countries in a post-democratic “austheritarian” situation and, on the other hand, because austerity encourages fascist and xenophobic parties.

Is it because of incompetence? No! Many things can be said against the political leaders of Europe, but they aren't stupid. Some of them probably look for solutions, but just can't find alternatives inside of the neoliberal framework of EU – and don't want to change it neither. But for other leaders, openly neoliberal, the issue is to seize the opportunity of the crisis in order to complete the neoliberal revolution (“never waste a good crisis”). Therefore, we are in an unprecedented situation, which requires new answers at European level as well as above secondary divisions - the radicalization of the fundamental contradiction between capital and labour, between the interests of the 1% and those of the 99%, confronts us with a historic task.

2. Anothe renigma

Why hasn't the economic, practical and theoretical defeat of neoliberalism led to the rise to power of governments determined to dare to break with the Troika and neoliberalism?

Is it because of the resignation of people? No! There have never been so many large-scale mobilizations than over the last 3 years! The main explanation is, in our opinion, the very construction of the European Union which makes traditional popular mobilizations inefficient: the

power is in Brussels or in Frankfurt, but the ability of people to mobilize and to fight lies with them in their company, their town, their region, their country.

This allows me to specify the nature of this historic mission that I mentioned a moment ago: in our opinion, what is urgent is to create a true European Social Movement.

What do we know about Social Movements? First, that they cannot be decreed (*otherwise we could decide that the European Social Movement would begin in this room tomorrow at 12:30 pm...*) ... but that it takes hard work to make them possible. Then, that they require three components:

- the ability to say **WE** (who we are)
- the ability to say **THEY** (who our opponents are) and
- the ability to say clearly **WHAT WE WANT**

To say **WE** is to regain the ambition of Hegemony. Gramsci distinguished between ruling class and dominant class by the following criterion: when the class in power is able to present its interests as those of the majority, it “rules”, that is to say that it exercises power through hegemony, through the adhesion of the masses to a credible discourse - the use of force being only an ancillary remedy. When this class can no longer decisively convince the masses, it is left with nothing more than repression and violence, it no longer “rules” anything and it is then nothing more than a dominant class. The brutal repression in Greece, in Spain, of Blockupy in Frankfurt, and the increase of freedom-restricting laws largely demonstrate that the European oligarchy has lost and abandoned the battle for hegemony. But that does not mean that we will win it! The left has a long tradition of fratricidal struggles conducted to determine the hegemony among us: we must now have the ambition to conquer together the hegemony against them.

To say **THEY** is not like some leaders do it, by accusing “nameless and faceless markets”. Our opponents are banks, multinational corporations, political parties and leaders, which have a name and an address. Anyway, I put this question to you: should we not go as far as denouncing the personal responsibility of these leaders? If Mr Barroso and Mr Trichet, Mrs Merkel and Mr Sarkozy, Mr Draghi and Mr Papademos were sitting in this room, should we not hold them accountable for our torn societies, for those families ravaged by precariousness, poverty and even hunger ... for the many suicides that have been caused by their decisions?

They would certainly respond that they are in no way personally responsible, that their decisions were ratified by parliaments in a perfectly legal manner, that they cannot therefore be blamed for anything and that they are untouchable ... And maybe that we would then tell them: ok, it's perfect! This is exactly what Mr Ben Ali and Mr Mubarak were saying one and a half year ago!

Finally, we must say **WHAT WE WANT** - in a language based on the needs and realities experienced by 99% of the people, those needs being the solution, not the problem! One of the victories of neoliberalism is to have led to believe that economy and politics required scholarly concepts and language, that the language of the people was not good enough. For example, to ask for “Eurobonds” may be a technical response at a given time, but it cannot be a political slogan just because it is very hard to explain this to the grocer on my street corner and because it will not get unemployed youth of my region out onto the streets.

3. A classical question : Что делать? What's to be done?

Already for years, the question has no longer been whether there are alternatives. “Tina” [1] died before Maggy: no regrets! Furthermore, there is an abundance of texts that describe, in a globally convergent manner, what should be credible alternatives for a democratic, ecological and social Europe. Manifestos and analyses follow one another, and a week rarely goes by without a new call for unity of social movements in Europe.

In this context, to the question “What to do?”, one possible answer would be: *“Go to Ikea and buy a shelf on which to store all the calls made in favour of a union for another Europe”*... Another answer is to consider that what is needed is to achieve the convergence of forces and their concrete unity in action. Our goal is to change Europe, not to change a statement. This unity will involve an action program that has at least the ambition to have an impact on the situation (and this asks for time enough to prepare / but we’ve to go fast enough to intervene in the momentum of the crisis that keeps on deepening).

Three remarks on what such an action program can be:

1. An action worthy of such name must:

- Scare the opponent: this is therefore not only a petition on the Internet or a demonstration to which participants must travel by plane!
- Make participants proud and happy to have committed themselves - as actors and not as part of a manipulated mass
- Consolidate and expand the organisation to enable it to go further.

2. In the context of the EU as it really exists, the action program must be designed from the outset and carried out all along as “bi-level”: purely national actions will not achieve anything, and European actions without strong roots in local and national realities are powerless.

3. Action must achieve unity. But we shouldn’t be naive about what unity means. To believe that the nature of the left and of the labour movement is to unify and that the nature of the right and of the capital is to divide, is to believe in children’s tales. To unify is to divide! The capitalists of my country are in favour of unity: they want us to be in solidarity with them against the Germans, the French, the Romanians, etc. We, the left and the labour movement, the internationalists, we have to divide because we know that it is by strategically choosing and clearly stating the dividing line (“They”) that we can achieve unity (“We”).

4. Goodnews

To implement this program of unity in action, there is already a concrete widely shared process, with a roadmap as well as commitments of over fifty national or European organizations from over fifteen countries.

a. A call - joined by many others - that allows a wide but clear convergence. [2] We notice a broad convergence with many other calls.

b. Many signatures. With names such as Ken Loach, Susan George or Stéphane Hessel. List open to be completed !

c. The relationship with the ESF has been clarified: do not replace, do not repeat: go further. We are a child of the ESF - and if the child is not recognized, it doesn't matter.

d. We have also clarified our relationship with the parties: the ESM must be led by the social movements, not by the parties; but we do not reject the political forces. We reject both the individualistic anti-politics and the old hierarchy in which social movements would be subordinated to politicians.

Personalities who support our appeal are welcome, we must each fight on our own turf; but we do not want the classical scheme in which the social movement drafts a list of demands and forwards it to the political world. "Por favor, no nos representan!" ("Please, do not represent us!") We are not asking politicians - men and women - to represent us, but to fight with us if they share the fundamental analysis summarised in our call.

e. Roadmap

We have two important events ahead of us: the "FIRENZE 10+10" gathering from November 8 to 11, and the Alter Summit itself, which could take place early 2013, probably in Athens. But we must be very aware that these two dates, if isolated, will not achieve anything. They indicate a common pace for this process that must begin before and continue afterwards:

- Before November, there is a lot of work for the European coordination, and the coordination for the Alter Summit must be put in place in as many countries or regions as possible, so that the delegations that will come to Firenze will have been fed by strategic national debates.
- Between November and Spring 2013, we will have approximately hundred days to build up mass mobilization at national or regional level. The ambition is to have an action day simultaneously in as many cities as possible in Europe, with common slogans that have a strong political impact.
- After the Alter Summit, the struggle will have to go on!

5. Badnews

The bad news is that there is work to be done! We need commitments in the joint national or regional coordinations. It's well known that the transformation of society would not come from dreamers who endlessly conceive theories, nor from opportunists who wait for the people, tired of oppression, to rise spontaneously, but that it required a patient work of organisation.

The proposal that we put on the table is not dogmatic. It has received much support, but it can still be improved in the coming weeks. If better proposals can strengthen the process, its power and its chances of success, they are all welcome. But, they have to come quickly because this process will not be stopped anymore.

The first emergency is to set up unitary coordinations at national or regional level, in order to drive this process.

Finally, we should have no illusions: this process opens a long-term struggle. Even if it succeeds - which will be difficult - this mobilisation process will not suffice. Yet, we want to work with all those who want to support it because, as we often say in the trade unions :

"He who fights can lose, but he who doesn't fight has already lost."

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Info : info altersummit.eu ; www.altersummit.eu

Footnotes

[1] Tina: “There Is No Alternative”

[2] This call is in nine languages on www.altersummit.eu. Available in English on ESSF (article 26115): [Europe: Call for an alternative summit](#).