

7th conference of EACL - European Anti-Capitalist Left: Preparing for battle

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The seventh conference of the European Anti-Capitalist Left (EACL), held in Paris during the European Social Forum on November 10-11, 2003, took place against the background of a world situation that unceasingly confirms the will to resist of peoples, workers, women and youth. Clashes and crises succeed each other at overwhelming speed - stock market crashes, bankruptcies of financial and industrial giants, collapses of entire sectors of the economy in some countries (Argentina), US invasions, complete political disarray following occupation, the crisis of the European Union's stability pact and so on.

Events intervention of this kind are not new; they have been going on for over a decade. What is different is the growing of the popular masses in the political process. What was once unnoticed or treated with indifference now stimulates the activity, consciousness and commitment of millions of people on every continent. It is not in Europe but in Latin America that the confrontations are at their most convulsive. However, precisely because the process is less brutal and slower in Europe, the regroupment of anti-capitalist forces there has more time to prepare before the key confrontations.

The EU is helping us because of its increased power and the contradictions it provokes among member states. The Constitution contains nothing new but it concentrates in a single, ordered, simplified text all the principles of capitalist modernization in Europe as well as a series of modalities of its application. This document thus acquires an extraordinary clarity. It reveals from its first pages the brutality of neoliberal policy, its imperialist targets, and its military preparation. Unhappily for the EU summit - what was supposed to have been settled in small committee is now debated by hundreds of thousands of people, many of them opposed to the process.

The process is centralizing all the political, economic, social and cultural questions and the questions of everyday life of 450 million citizens. "European governance" has not succeeded in containing the internal contradictions of the EU. From now on all is known and all is discussed. The more the contradictions inside the EU come to light, the more the broad public will get involved and the more social and political forces will have an impact on events.

EACL - political cohesion

The EACL in its biannual conferences has worked for four years to build a new political force that is pluralist, anti-capitalist and representative. Its creation in March 2000 was the result of three combined factors - the EU's offensive around the euro, the emergence of the movement for global justice and the successful experience in several countries of new parties of the radical left (the Red Green Alliance in Denmark, the Left Bloc in Portugal, the Scottish Socialist Party, the LCR in France) opposed to neoliberal social democracy and differentiated from the Communist (Stalinist) tradition. Common programmatic priorities emerged - anti-capitalist and ecologist, anti-imperialist and anti-war, feminist, anti-racist and internationalist. As an alternative to capitalism, a democratic socialist society, self-managed from below, without exploitation of labour and oppression of women, based on durable development. As strategy, a social orientation centred on the everyday lives of workers, full and stable employment, decent wages, a viable income in case of unemployment, sickness or invalidity, or retirement, rights to housing, education, professional training and quality health care. That will require a break with neoliberalism - the redevelopment of public services, reconstruction of the state budget and redistribution of wealth from capital to labour, in short, in order to realise these social objectives, to take all necessary anti-capitalist measures including the substitution of social ownership for private ownership.

There is consensus on these points, together with the common intervention in the mass mobilisations of a social and anti-war nature and the valorisation of the movement for global justice as essential vector of today's struggles. This is a solid basis, as experience has shown. The EACL as a whole is heterogeneous in its origins, traditions, ideologies, methods of intervention, and internal regime. And each party or movement is free to decide its policies and alliances. All this has created a well-defined and visible anti-capitalist current to the left of social democracy on the European level.

Until now, we have not felt the need to deepen a strategic conception of the road to socialism and to specify what that socialism means, or to give an elaborated ideological coherence to our overall demands. The priority has been the big issues in the world today. Thus, there has been a recurrent and detailed discussion on the EU, its nature and policies, and on the alternative, the strategy for another Europe.

Debates on Europe

There was solid agreement on the idea that our opposition to the EU is radical and that the solution is internationalist, for another Europe. This avoids any nationalist temptation and any illusion that another anti-capitalist policy can be built in "a single country". The main disagreements are the reflection of the very variable degree of integration (mainly economic) of the member countries in the EU and the national civilisation (or the culture/history) of the countries or regions. It is enough to point to: the geopolitical positioning of Great Britain in relation to continental Europe; the big Scandinavian region, very different from southern Europe but very differentiated in itself; Norway and Iceland, still outside the EU, Sweden and Denmark, still outside the euro, Finland, integrated into it; southern Europe (Spain, Greece, Italy), the so-called "Club Med" with a different economic structure from that at the heart of the EU - Benelux, Germany and France which have been at the heart of European culture and its disasters for ten centuries.

The EACL has made a big effort, with two conferences per year, to overcome misunderstandings, situate real disagreements and test changes. This being done, beyond nuances, two types of strategy of struggle inside the EU have emerged in the EACL.

In the northern countries, to argue for each member country's rapid exit from the EU, via a referendum (see the recent rejection by the Swedish people of the euro). The major political crisis that would follow would pose the possibility of a new EU on another basis. This strategy is based on the hypothesis that the EU is an artificial and fragile construction that would collapse easily in the short term.

In the rest of the EU, the strategic hypothesis starts from social mobilizations of great breadth (undoubtedly beginning in one single country) for one or several social, economic, democratic, or ecological objectives or demands - leading to political confrontation with the national government, which could spread to neighbouring countries. That would lead to a crisis of the EU (which is supposed to react to any challenge to its norms). Without going into details, this second option, which is located at the heart of the EU, takes up a range of European demands, actions and links which would in reality require the construction of an active political, trade union and social movement on a European scale.

The difficulty does not stop there. For the northern countries, the anti-capitalist left must show how a referendum which appeals to all social classes, even if it leads to a political crisis, leads to a questioning of the national bourgeois state and the reversal of neoliberal policies. For the other EU countries, the thorny question of the EU state institutions is posed from another angle. There is a well-known problem that has been posed to the workers' movement since its birth - how to impose its demands on the bourgeois state (parliament, tribunals, collective agreements) and "legalize" social and democratic conquests? In the EU the difficulty is enormous, the current and future institutions rule out the very concept of legally embodying social demands won at the national level at the European level. There is today an impasse on this key point. The experience of future struggles will indicate the road to follow.

The Constitution and the elections

The 7th conference adopted a coherent, unanimous position on the EU's draft constitution:

"We will transform the June 2004 European elections into a huge mobilizing campaign against the EU's reactionary and regressive constitution and for a different Europe; against neoliberal policies and for an anti-capitalist programme; against imperialist war and European militarism and for peace and general disarmament, starting out in our own countries. Country by country, we aim to provide a strong anti-capitalist alternative which is broad and pluralistic, in order to fight for the European social movement's demands and perspectives.

Yes, we can have a different Europe - if all the social forces that have mobilised these last four years fight for their demands and programmes in the streets and at the ballot box, through mobilisations and elections." (EACL declaration, Paris, November 2003).

Without transforming itself into a European party, the Conference had its first discussion on this subject. An initial proposal was put forward to organise the European anti-capitalist current into a "European anti-capitalist left bloc" (or a "European alliance of anti-capitalist parties") to pursue two concrete objectives. These would be to establish at a national level the strongest and most representative radical left alliance and to discuss possible alliances with other political currents, in particular parties from the CP tradition, which are in the process of forming a European party.

Representatives of several communist or alternative parties were present at the meeting and actively intervened in this debate. Their orientation was to ask the anti-capitalist parties to join their European party. There are two problems with this:

1. The question of the EU constitution. All positions are present within the CP tradition - against and for, and everything in between. There is also the question of neoliberal policies, the relationship to social democracy, the question of participation in a centre-left government, the European army, the pseudo-humanitarian intervention of a national army in conflicts and so on. A strong campaign requires political clarification on these questions.

2. There is the question of practical positioning on the political chessboard. Over the course of ten years now the CP tradition has become strongly differentiated in relation to size, basic ideology, tactical choices, internal regime and so on. Like the anti-capitalist left, it seeks to survive as a recognised political factor in society. For various reasons (political sensitivities, common work, or quite simply the electoral pragmatism imposed by anti-democratic electoral laws), rapprochements are taking place on the national level with the anti-capitalist left which in some countries plays a recognised political role.

Anti-capitalist left and Communist left

The electoral landscape is approximately as follows at the time of writing.

- There will be no electoral competition between anti-capitalist left and Communist left in Italy, Spain, Luxemburg, England and Wales, Scotland, Ireland and the Netherlands.
- The anti-capitalist left is integrated in the PRC (Italy) and Izquierda Unida (Spain). In England and Wales, at the initiative of the radical left (Socialist Alliance, SWP) a new left coalition is being discussed involving some intellectuals and artists (Ken Loach and George Monbiot) the Communist Party of Britain, the recently expelled Labour MP George Galloway and some important trades unionists. In Scotland the SSP comprises nearly all the real left. In Ireland, the Socialist Party (Trotskyist, formerly "Militant") has one representative in the national parliament and plans to establish a broad coalition with other components of the radical left. In the Netherlands a good part of the radical left is active in the Socialist Party (a group of Maoist origin), which has undergone a spectacular growth in recent years. In Luxemburg, La Gauche/Die Lenk involves all the left and far left except for the small CP, which has just split, from it.
- Denmark is a case apart, as the radical left, the Red Green Alliance, has never put forwards its own list for European elections but, having participated in the big referendum campaigns of the 1990s, is supporting candidates on the lists put forwards by the June Movement and the Popular Movement against the EU. The Popular Socialists, of Communist origin, have reconciled themselves with social democracy - they support the EU as a counterweight to the US and they wish to participate in a centre-left government with the centre!
- In three countries, there will be a real electoral confrontation - France, Portugal and Greece.
- In Portugal, a CP heavily marked by Stalinism will face the Left Bloc, a radical and pluralist party with the wind in its sails.
- In France, the LCR-LO electoral bloc will confront the French CP. The stakes are colossal. Because of internal divisions, the PCF has not made a balance sheet of its disastrous participation with social democracy in a neoliberal government. The political earthquake of the French presidential election of 2002, where the revolutionary left obtained nearly 3 million votes, demonstrates this. The political landscape of the broad left is polarised between the SP and the LCR-LO electoral bloc, to such an extent that the Greens and the CP could implode. The regional elections of March 2004 will give an initial indication before the European vote.

- In Greece there is a spectacular change that could transform the political situation on the left. Synaspismos (whose distant ancestor is the "interior" CP) has just concluded an electoral bloc for the national elections (in early May 2004) with a significant sector of the radical left (AKOA, DEA, KEDA, KOE, Left Citizens List). It is the culmination of two processes - the radicalisation of Synaspismos (the right wing has left it) and the "desectarianization" of a sector of the anti-capitalist left. For the first time in the sad history of the Greek left, fragmentation and endemic sectarianism are being challenged and a credible alternative to the CP (KKE) is appearing.

Our perspective

Institutional manipulations to bar the real left from access to parliament have become commonplace and on our side tactical acrobatics are inevitable. There is nothing despicable in that, provided the relations between the different currents are transparent and the political orientations are clearly defined.

For the EACL cannot forget its perspective of "a new political and social force on a massive scale across the European continent" (EACL declaration, November 2003). For the moment, that means convincing the mass of activists on the social left to participate in the electoral battle. We need to be aggressive and flexible in order to appeal to feminists, trades unionists, intellectuals, citizens, artists and so on. The agenda adopted by the Assembly of Social Movements, at the European Social Forum in Paris in November- two days of mobilization on a European scale on March 20, 2004 against the war and May 9, 2004 against the EU draft constitution - will be ours also.

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P.S.

* "European Anti-Capitalist Left: Preparing for battle". From <http://internationalviewpoint.org/>