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Statement of the Paris Meeting of the European Anti-Capitalist Left

Europe: A different Europe is possible! A different European Left is necessary!

Thursday 2 November 2006, by [EACL](#) (Date first published: 11 November 2003).

For the first time in 20 years, a counter-offensive has been launched to stop the disasters that are threatening us: war, neoliberal policies, and ecological catastrophe. Millions of workers, men and women, young and old, organised in a multitude of grassroots movements, trade unions and parties or simply unorganized people, have, by the hundreds of thousands or even millions, occupied the streets and launched massive strikes, sometimes paralysing the state machinery. In the space of three years, the atmosphere has changed.

A different world is possible. In Genoa in July 2001, they tried to crush our movement with fierce repression; but the movement survived and bounced back. In November 2002, 60,000 young and not-so-young people from the whole of Europe converged on Florence to lay the foundation stones of a new European social movement. The next day a million demonstrators launched a warning to our rulers: No war! Hands off our rights! Three months later, on February 15, 2003, there were tens of millions of us around the world fighting to stop the barbarism of war. Last year in Florence and this year in Paris/St.Denis, the European Social Forum is providing an organized form, social cohesion and a political direction to this extraordinary explosion of energy and creativity. This planetary uprising for universal peace took on the character in Europe of a continent-wide plebiscite: facing the EU, people voted for a different Europe, from below, founded on a revolt of the exploited and oppressed in all the member countries. European big capital has made no mistake about it: its attacks have redoubled in all the member countries and on every front, despite this strong, increasingly coherent opposition.

No to the multinationals' constitution!

Yes to a different Europe - a peoples' Europe, democratic, social and peaceful!

Fifteen governments are about to impose a constitution from behind closed doors on 450 million people. The so-called Convention - a select club operating behind closed doors - has taken the place of a constituent process, based on a mandate coming out of the sovereignty of the peoples of Europe. This is a break with the entire parliamentary tradition that had grown up since the democratic revolutions of the 17th and 18th centuries! Instead of the Social Europe they promised us, they are imposing a European Power on us, founded on wars (the 1991 war on Iraq, the Balkan wars throughout the 1990s, the new US war) and economic conquest (the fall of the USSR and then Eastern Europe). We say no to this EU constitution and no to this neoliberal EU.

This constitution is dangerous.

First, it consecrates the absolute primacy of the market; it legally forbids any infringement of private property or market relations. It refuses to give legal status to social gains that have been won on the national level through a century and a half of workers' struggles: basic social rights, laws on

working conditions, labour contracts, trade-union presence and intervention within workplaces, the right to strike, freedom of association.... While it centrally supports and institutionalises the functioning of capital, it leaves labour standards decentralized on the national level and makes them obsolete at the European level. This will lead to systematic, no-holds-barred competition among the wage earners of the different member countries and within each country.

Second, budgetary constraints (institutionalised in the Maastricht criteria) will drastically reduce social benefits and hamstring public economic policy. With this as the starting point, systematic privatization of public services and social security will become "inevitable", because public services will be "unaffordable". Industrial and financial capital will thus gain a vast, very lucrative playing field. The super-rich will get richer. Working people - workers, youth, the unemployed and casualized, women, immigrants, etc. - will pay the price. In the past 50 years, social inequality has never been as great as now.

Third, the constitution confirms the EU's semi-despotic, undemocratic character. The real political power remains in the hands of the governments (the European Council) and to a lesser extent the Commission. The European Central Bank is totally independent, functions in total opacity, and is accountable to no one. The European Parliament is not comparable to national parliaments: it does not legislate, adopt the budget, or choose the executive. The constitution does not recognise the multinational character of the member states that deny the right to self-determination of the "nations without states", in the name of the territorial integrity principle. Admittedly, the EU is a complex structure. But one thing is clear: power in the EU does not emanate from the citizens or peoples, but from governments. That's the world upside down!

Fourth, the constitution does not recognise citizenship rights, including the right to vote, for citizens of a third country residing in a member state.

Finally, the constitution legally obliges the EU and its member countries from now on to reinforce their military capabilities and act in close cooperation with NATO. This legal obligation will be a bonanza for the military-industrial complex. This is the road to European-style militarism. The "European defence" that France, Britain and Germany are pushing for confirms their political will and shows the space they want to occupy: inside the imperialist system, alongside the USA. We say no to this Europe; we struggle for a different Europe: social and democratic, ecological and feminist, peaceful and in solidarity.

The responsibility of the European social-democratic parties

Nobody and no organization that claims to be on the left can agree with the contents of this constitution. Yet European social democracy and the Green parties have already taken sides: their response will be "yes". True, they say, it is all far from perfect, but it is the lesser evil and we can improve it. They put forward three justifications to make us swallow this bitter pill: the EU is an advance over the past, so therefore undermining it means falling into nationalism, European wars, etc.; the EU and particularly the European Commission are defending the "communitarian" dimension of Europe, "therefore" they are helping the European trade-union movement; and the EU must become an economic and political and therefore military force in the world so as to provide a "counterweight" to the United States. This "lesser evil" is eating away at politics like a cancer. In its name, the social democratic parties have swallowed the European bosses' neoliberal programme and the EU's steady backwards march. Applying this program on the governmental level has led to the deep demoralization of the world of labour and the trade union movement. The social democratic parties are profoundly discredited because of the loss of the popular layers in society. This leads us to reject entry into a government with social democracy on the basis of their neoliberal programme.

The social democratic parties have not even tried to stop this infernal machine, prevent the neoliberal counter-reform and block this undemocratic European apparatus. They have not even tried to achieve unity in action with the ETUC (European Trade Union Confederation) and mobilise on a European scale. It would have been easy for them, especially since at the decisive moment for the EU in the late 1990s social-democratic parties were running 12 out of the 15 governments and dominated the main EU institutions (the Commission and Council). Today, in opposition, the social-democratic parties are trying to erase their recent balance sheet. But the world of labour, women, young people, immigrants and the rest of us have not forgotten the pain that the social democrats have inflicted on us. Blair and Schröder, still in power today, are around to remind us what their true social democratic policies are. The largest Green parties have chosen that road. Joschka Fischer, German Minister of Foreign Affairs and Daniel Cohn-Bendit, a key player in the European Parliament, struggle to align all the Green parties behind the neoliberal constitution and the European superpower.

Rebirth of social and labour movements The “global justice” movement has broken this 20-year-old impasse, creating a left alternative and a perspective for liberation. A new political generation is mounting the barricades. In the last few years in countries including Italy, France, Britain, Greece and Spain, millions of workers and young people have marched shoulder to shoulder in antiwar mobilizations and workers’ struggles. This movement, international from the beginning, has quickly become a reference point in society and a rallying point for a multitude of social forces and organizations. It has given birth to a worldwide antiwar movement on a scale never seen before. At the same time, in Florence, it laid the foundations of a new European social movement. Today the ESF is on the threshold of a convergence with the world of labour in the “rich” countries by taking up two fundamental social issues: the exploitation of labour and the oppression of women.

Compared with the EU, bosses and ruling classes, most of the leadership of the traditional trade-union movement is lagging worryingly behind, in particular the European Trade Union Confederation. Where are the European gatherings, the European responses, the European action programmes, the European actions and strikes and the European strategy that we need to resist the transnational, internationally organised bosses? Why was there no European strike against the war when all the peoples of Europe were taking to the streets of London, Rome, Paris, Berlin, Brussels, Amsterdam and Madrid on February 15? How can we fight to win this “different” Europe?

We will need a new mass social movement, a profound renewal of the trade-union movement and a new citizens’ movement to fight the key upcoming battles.

The 2004 European elections

The EU constitution is an issue concerning us all. But the EU is doing everything to avoid the only true test: letting the peoples of Europe decide about Europe! Some governments are even too scared to hold a referendum! In reality the EU is staking everything on the June 2004 European elections so as to smuggle its project through.

We say: what petty grafters!

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 mobilized these last four years fight for their demands and programmes in the

streets and at the ballot box, through mobilisations and elections.

For the first time in 25 years a huge oppositional, internationalist, anti-capitalist milieu is emerging on a world scale, to different extents in different countries. Nobody and no political party is capable of co-opting or manipulating this proud, conscious force. Yet the fear of being co-opted and manipulated is there. The best way to ward off the danger is to seize political space, and make a collective intervention in the battle during these elections based on the social movement's central demands, which have already been brought to life in the European Social Forum. Otherwise we risk an absurd outcome: while the social movement fights on the ground, the traditional parties of the neoliberal left walk off with the political "conclusion".

We need a different European Left!

We need a new political force: anti-capitalist and European Faced with the traditional Right, which is increasingly aggressive and reactionary, faced with a far Right that is racist and a threat to democratic freedoms, and faced with a social-liberal Left that is totally devoted to the policies of the ruling classes, we need a political alternative that takes up the aspirations of the social, anti-capitalist left. It is up to the tens of thousands of men and women, young people and old, workers and citizens engaged in the movement and mobilizations to build this new anti-capitalist force for the radical transformation of society. Nobody else can do it in their place. Giving up on the job out of inertia, suspicion, hesitance or incomprehension would mean giving a green light to endless reruns of social-liberalism - which would be a disaster. We have to work together on a radical, unitary and pluralist basis.

The European Anti-Capitalist Left wants, without arrogance, to make a contribution to this project. We are not something different from the social left; we are an integral part of the social left. We have been in the social movement and "global justice" movement from the start, building it and strengthening it.

Our project reflects the different motivating forces inspiring the social movement: anti-capitalist and ecologist, anti-imperialist and antiwar, feminist and grassroots, anti-racist and internationalist. As an alternative to capitalism, we seek a socialist, democratic society, self-managed from below, without exploitation at work or oppression of women, founded on sustainable development as opposed to a "growth model" that threatens the planet. As a strategy, we have a social orientation, very concerned with working people's daily lives: we demand a stable, fulltime job, a living wage, a liveable social benefit in case of unemployment, sickness, disabling conditions or retirement, the right to housing, education and professional training and quality health care, for everyone. This requires undoing neoliberal policies and breaking with capitalism: (re)developing public services, recasting government budgets and redistributing wealth from capital to labour. In short, in order to reach our social objectives we propose to take all necessary anti-capitalist measures, including replacing private property with social property.

Only a new political and social force on a massive scale across the European continent will be able to impose our social demands and realise our hopes for a better world. A "different Europe" is possible, but a different European Left is necessary.

The following organisations signed this Declaration in Paris, on November 10-11, 2003:

Scottish Socialist Party (SSP, Scotland)

Red Green Alliance (RGA, Denmark)

Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire (LCR, France)

Left Bloc (BdE, Portugal)

Socialist Alliance (SA, England)

Socialist Workers Party (SWP, England)

Socialist Party (SP, Ireland)

Socialist Party (SP, England)

The Left (LG/DL, Luxemburg)

Alternative Space (EA, Spain)

Zutik (Basque Country)

United and Alternative Left (EUiA, Catalonia)

Solidarities (S-S, Switzerland)

Party of Liberty and Solidarity (ÖDP, Turkey)