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ReCommons Europe

Impact of European policies on the Global South and possible alternatives

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The year 2020 was marked by two events that revealed, once again, the limits of the capitalist system. First, the CoViD-19 pandemic caused by the new coronavirus SARS-CoV-2, responsible for the deaths of several hundred thousand people and counting, highlighted the vulnerability of human societies in the absence of adequately funded public health services. It also served to highlight which activities are essential to the existence of human societies. Second, the pandemic precipitated the greatest economic crisis since the 1930s. By revealing the fragility of societies where exchanges are extremely rapid and production chains are internationalized, the pandemic also revealed the most irrational aspects of the economic system that governs and structures social relations in almost all parts of the world. Thus, capitalism appears to be incapable not only of providing for basic human needs but also of reproducing its own functioning. All governments that initially try to protect both the law of profit and their citizens' lives inevitably find themselves tempted to defend the former against the latter.

The neoliberal structural adjustment policies which have been pursued for decades have played an important role in increasing inequality and, ultimately, in the way the epidemic has spread. Contrary to widespread belief, the epidemic does indeed differentiate between origins and social classes, affecting in particular those at the bottom of the social ladder. It has also particularly affected countries that, on the pretext of maintaining strict fiscal discipline, have given up - or have been prevented from - building an efficient and accessible health care system.

Thus, while many countries in the Global North are experiencing the harmful consequences of the privatizations and budget cuts that have been applied in recent decades, the countries of the South are for the most part prevented from developing efficient health care systems because of the heavy burden of debt on their public accounts.

In the European Union, the crisis has again been marked by an inability of Member States to coordinate their responses and develop common strategies. While the small island nation of Cuba - which has been subjected to a US blockade for 60 years - sent medical teams to more than 20 countries including Italy, which was hard hit by the pandemic (this is in line with Cuba's policy of international solidarity, as recently demonstrated in Haiti after the 2010 earthquake or in Africa against the Ebola virus), the policies of EU Member States in this area have been more than timid if not non-existent. No stockpiles of masks or medical equipment had been jointly agreed on in the EU. No European medical team was formed. The national retrenchment sought by the extreme right-wing forces scored a point when the various governments closed their borders (in a very disorderly manner). Only after months of prevarication do Eurozone Member States seem to have reluctantly agreed to pool a small share of their sovereign debt - a decision that the stronger states will surely make the weaker ones pay for by continuing the fierce competition that characterizes the Economic and Monetary Union.

When it came to defending the interests of the capitalist class and their companies, on the other hand, the Member States of the EU, like the other countries of the Global North, were all able to develop a similar political orientation aimed, as in the case of the bank bailouts that took place from 2008 onwards, at socializing the losses of large companies (with no guarantee that jobs would be maintained) by injecting vast amounts of public money into them. In order to do this, the EU Member States did not hesitate to abandon the dogma of fiscal and budgetary discipline on the basis of which Greece and other countries on the European periphery had been designated as "bad pupils" and forced to adopt severe austerity measures during the previous crisis. European governments are thus once again agreeing to increase their public debt in order to help big capital and thus make the people pay for the crisis.

The specific impact of the CoViD-19 pandemic in the countries of the Global South is a striking example of the

accentuation of inequalities between different regions of the world. It is a situation in which the European Union and many European States have a major responsibility, because of past and present policies towards these countries of the Global South. Any force aspiring to break with the dominant capitalist order on the European continent must act to put an end to the exploitation of the peoples of the Global South.

The present work is the fruit of the ReCommonsEurope project, which we have been carrying on within the Citizens for Financial Justice consortium since 2019. Previously, from 2018 onwards, this project engaged the CADTM, in collaboration with the European Research Network on Social and Economic Policy (EReNSEP) and the Basque trade union Eusko Langileen Alkartasuna (ELA), in a project aimed at fuelling the debate on the measures that a popular government in Europe should prioritize. The present work is relevant for all social movements, peoples and political movements that seek a radical change in favour of the 99%. In line with our commitment to develop concrete proposals for dealing with immediate problems, we have chosen to call this project "Impact of European policies on the Global South and possible alternatives."

With this second phase, we seek to define a set of clear proposals that a popular government should implement in order to bring about real and profound change in the unjust relations between European states and the peoples of the Global South. To this end, we are engaged in a process of elaborating texts, based on joint work between activists, politicians and researchers from countries of the Global South and Global North. This work concerns the following areas: debts claimed by countries of the Global North - in particular European countries - from countries of the Global South; free trade agreements; migration and border management policies; militarism, the arms trade and wars; and reparation policies with regard to the spoliation of cultural property. In this brochure, in order to set out a general framework, we take up and adapt the chapter on international relations from the [Manifesto for a New Popular Internationalism](#) in Europe signed in 2019 by more than 160 people from 21 European countries. This manifesto was published in four languages (French, Castilian Spanish, English and Serbo-Croatian). It presents the most urgent measures concerning the following issues: money, banks, debt, labour and social rights, the energy transition in order to build eco-socialism, women's rights, health and education, as well as more broadly international politics and the need to promote constituent processes.

More than ever, we believe that it is essential to fuel and develop debate on alternatives to a system that increasingly shows its incompatibility with such a fundamental right as the right to lead a life of dignity.

ReCommonsEurope was initiated by two international networks, the CADTM and EReNSEP, and the Basque trade union ELA, in order to contribute to the strategic debates taking place within the European popular Left today. It was written in one year by sixteen people active in six different countries (Belgium, Bosnia, France, Greece, the Spanish State, and the United Kingdom); the authors are active in different organisations and movements (trade unions, political parties, activist movements) and bring together diverse and complementary expertise (economics, political science, philosophy, anthropology, law, ecology, unionism, feminism, North/South solidarity, and so on). Three generations are represented. The Manifesto is supported by more than 160 signatories from 21 different European countries, among whom a majority of women.

PS:

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