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Europe

# One Question: The European Left

- Features -

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**One Question is a monthly series in which we ask leading thinkers to give a brief answer to a single question.**

**This month we ask:**

**What are the challenges and opportunities for the Left in Europe?**

**G M Tamás**

Like so often in history, judging the present is made difficult by established attachments and enmities. The European Left today is preoccupied still with the ancient struggle against globalisation and neoliberalism – the aftereffects of which can still be felt, granted – and cannot adapt its strategies to the new epoch of protectionism and ethnicism (the latter term defined in my ‘Ethnicism after Nationalism’ in *Socialist Register 2016*), resulting in the resounding victories of the far Right almost everywhere.

There is not much about the European Union a person on the Left might love. It is an institution of capitalism just as much as the nation-states are. It is highly imperfect: it is unfair and chaotic, being led as it is by short-sighted philistines. But it is being undermined by frankly reactionary governments, especially from the former Habsburg empire, abandoned by England and subjected to the unremitting hostility of the new regime in the United States and of Putin’s Russia.

This fundamental fact makes it unlikely that an anti-European Left is possible: the thrust of the attack of the main enemy – the extreme Right – makes the hostility among many of us felt towards the European Union futile at best, suicidal at worst. The League of Nations was unloved, too, but its dissolution led to Munich and to the Nazi conquest of Europe. It is always self-defeating when the Left allies itself with, or allows itself to be the dupe of, nationalist, ethnicist, xenophobic or racist forces of whatever nature, and it has also been frequently dishonourable.

This historical rule of thumb is shown to be valid again in the most burning issue of the moment, the refugee crisis, specifically, and the migration problem generally, caused by global and regional inequality, by war and by the ecological disaster. Migration has been used efficiently by the far Right everywhere to take power and to change political opinion into one dominated not simply by authoritarianism as such, but by a veritable passion of inequality, aiming – like fascism – at the obliteration of the whole heritage of Enlightenment and at a preventive counter-revolution against a possible socialist renewal.

And we see the likes of Sahra Wagenknecht – one of the most influential leaders of the German, and hence of the European, Left – mouthing xenophobic, anti-immigrant and anti-European platitudes in the by now customary ‘left populist’ style that I consider a menace. This does not help to address the chief peril – the post-fascist domination of politics and the new decline of bourgeois liberalism – to the world and to ourselves.

**Donatella Della Porta**

Is there still time for another Europe? In November 2002, the first European Social Forum in Florence brought together tens of thousands of activists and thousands of social movement organisations that developed innovative

proposals about how to build a social, inclusive and democratic Europe. In November 2018, sixteen years later, the hopes to change European Union institutions in a progressive direction have been deeply disappointed by increasing inequalities and declining democratic qualities.

The EU responses to the financial crisis have been oriented by a blind defence of neoliberal doctrines, faced by the blatant signs of their failures in fulfilling promises of prosperity. The democratic deficit has become all the more acute as the EU institutions, whose power has increased during the crisis, are the least transparent and accountable to citizens. In these conditions, progressive movements have found it more and more difficult to talk about Europe, and even more to organise at EU level. As right-wing populist parties develop Eurosceptic positions, critical frames on the Left are more difficult to articulate.

At the same time, trust in the possibility of changing EU institutions has been shaken by the austerity policies cruelly imposed on the weakest economies, and the lack of capacity to find inclusive responses to migration. Rather, the very characteristics of the financial crisis, and the political and social crisis it fuelled, have made inequalities among and inside European states all the more evident, with ensuing claims for national sovereignty.

Yet, as decisions continue to be made at EU level, protests also need to shift scale to challenge power where it is located. Additionally, this will become all the more essential as the EU elections will be, this time, more polarised than ever. Facing the big threats on the Right, progressive movements will need to articulate alternatives. In short, thinking about another Europe will be all the more necessary, even if it is more and more difficult.

### **Josep Maria Antentas**

The Left in Europe undoubtedly faces innumerable challenges. We can perhaps boil these down to the need to build an internationalism of the 99%, which requires developing a coherent criticism of the EU, engaging in cross-border political activity, and shaping a plural political and social subject that fits our societies marked by growing fragmentation and diversity.

European integration has served as a lever for permanent neoliberal restructuring, for reinforcing the neoliberal goal of social de-politicisation and the emptying of politics itself. However, the European Left continues to have difficulties in articulating a convincing critique of the EU project, in a scenario where the xenophobic far Right has made frontal attack on the EU one of its key issues.

There exists a double strategic danger for the Left: leaving the monopoly of criticism of the EU to the far Right or, conversely, adopting the latter's political frame of rejection of the EU on the exclusive grounds of national sovereignty and, therefore, entering a playing field favourable to reactionary forces. For this reason, internationalism must be an inseparable part of any strategy for opposing the EU. Solidarity and international cooperation should not be dissociated from national sovereignty, and any proposal of disobedience towards, and disengagement from, the EU should go parallel with the perspective of new models of integration and cooperation among European states.

In terms of the terrain of struggle, the challenge is to articulate dialectically the local, national or state (when the two do not overlap), and international scalar levels. It is not a question of opposing all these levels of action binarily, but of seeking to combine them in organisational, operational and programmatic terms through what Daniel Bensaïd called a 'sliding scale of spaces'. The current phase of resistance to austerity policies has been dominated by the primacy of the national-state arena and internationally coordinated mobilisations and campaigns have been limited, despite some important initiatives, such as the meetings of Plan B and the campaign against TTIP (although the latter only took root in the domestic policy of certain countries). Strengthening the cross-border capacity for action and common thinking is a strategic priority.

Internationalism also has an ‘internal’ dimension – that is, building collective solidarities in societies that are increasingly plural in racial, cultural and linguistic terms, and increasingly individualised and fragmented. The positions from the Left that favour stricter regulation of immigration and asylum, which flirt with nativism, only serve to further divide the workers and dig a trench between ‘natives’ and immigrants. Although they are put forward with the argument of fighting the far Right they actually serve to generate a favourable framework for it. Made in the name of the working class, in fact, they constitute the very negation of genuine class politics. Racism is deeply embedded in the history of capitalism and an anti-capitalist or anti-austerity Left that it is not anti-racist, is in reality, empty of real emancipatory strategic potential.

### Thomas Fazi

Though the Left has been making inroads in some European countries, there is no denying that, for the most part, the Right and extreme Right have been more effective at tapping into the legitimate grievances of the masses. This, as Bill Mitchell and I argue in our book *Reclaiming the State*, is because they are the only forces that have been able to provide a response to the widespread yearning for greater territorial or national sovereignty, increasingly seen as the only way, in the absence of effective supranational mechanisms of representation, to regain some degree of collective control over politics and society.

So why has the Left not been able to develop an alternative, progressive view of national sovereignty in response to neoliberal globalisation? The answer largely lies in the fact that most strands of left-wing thought have accepted the false narrative that national states have essentially been rendered obsolete by neoliberalism and/or globalisation and thus that meaningful change can only be achieved at the international/supranational level.

This is particularly evident in the European debate, where, despite the disastrous effects of the EU and monetary union, the Left continues to cling on to these institutions and to the belief that they can be reformed in a progressive direction, despite all evidence to the contrary.

This position, however, presents numerous problems. Firstly, it ignores the fact that the EU’s economic and political constitution is structured to produce the very results that we are seeing today – the weakening of labour, the erosion of popular sovereignty, etc. It is designed precisely to impede the kind of radical reforms to which progressive integrationists or federalists aspire – and for this reason cannot be reformed.

More generally, this position is tantamount to relinquishing the discursive and political battleground for a post-neoliberal hegemony to the Right. It is not hard to see that if progressive change can only be implemented at the global or even European level – in other words, if the alternative to the status quo offered to electorates is one between reactionary nationalism and progressive globalism – then the Left has already lost the battle.

It needn’t be this way, however. A progressive, emancipatory vision of national sovereignty needn’t necessarily come at the expense of European cooperation. On the contrary, there is ample evidence that the vice-like grip of the single currency, by exacerbating intra-European divergences and causing widespread social devastation, is now endangering the beneficial aspects that accompanied the formation of the European Union.

The true value of the European project is in its capacity to deliver a rule of law throughout Europe and engender multilateral cooperation on matters such as immigration, climate change, human trafficking, and global concerns that single nations cannot solve alone. Returning to national governments, the monetary and fiscal tools needed to provide for the well-being of their citizens would not undermine that sort of cooperation. On the contrary, it would provide the basis for a renewed European project – and more generally for a new international(ist) world order – based on multilateral cooperation between sovereign states.

### **Françoise Vergès**

Françoise Vergès is a long-time antiracist feminist activist. She is currently Global South(s) Chair at Fondation maison des sciences de l'homme in the Collège d'études mondiales, Paris.

The challenges:

It is time for the Left in Europe – one wonders if it is not too late – to get rid of its paternalism and to reflect on what it owes to antiracist, anticolonial and decolonial theories and struggles. What it learned from the anti-slavery, anticolonial and anti-imperialist struggles about freedom and equality but also about its own shortcomings, blind spots, institutional racism that always goes with racial sexism.

It must engage in its own de-racialisation and decolonisation – of its theories, practices, structures and institutions, but not as an aside, not as a topic for a commission, but as a central debate. It must read Aimé Césaire, Frantz Fanon, Amílcar Cabral, Angela Davis, bell hooks, María Lugones, etc. It must understand how 'Europe underdeveloped Africa', and how the Left benefited from white supremacy. Anti-capitalist struggle is political antiracist struggle, there is not class + race + gender but racialised class, gender as a racial disciplinary tool, race as a justification for exploitation, discrimination and politics of murder. It must 'get' racial capitalism and decolonial feminism.

The opportunities:

It is here in Europe that a decolonial theory and practice can emerge, in the heart of a continent where a limitless desire to conquer and subjugate the world led to genocides, massacres, wars, and the destruction of nature. Europe did not invent wars and destruction but it put all its spirit, imagination, armies, school system, scientific and technological knowledge to fulfil its goal of shaping the world in its own image.

Aimé Césaire taught us that the return-effect of slavery and colonialism inevitably led to the destruction and murder of European peoples by Europeans themselves. Frantz Fanon invited us to leave Europe behind, to walk away from its death instinct. But some of us live in Europe and do not want to leave. The opportunities to change come from the women and men who are European citizens or live in Europe but who offer other epistemologies and ways of thinking about freedom, equality, gender, race, or democracy.

Yet, some of us are also tired of speaking about race to white people. Indeed, as long as people on the Left do not want to admit that they are white and to learn how it happened, how Europeans invented 'the white race', the current opportunity may become another lost opportunity. And among the movements in the Left that must decolonise, there is one that really must do it, which is the feminist movement that has fostered femo-nationalism and femo-imperialism.

### **Alen TopliĀjek**

The biggest challenge facing the Left in Europe today is mobilising the masses behind an alternative democratic project against the backdrop of the rise of the populist radical Right and neoliberal globalisation. While the populist radical Right has been more successful in exploiting the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis and the migration crisis by seizing the reins of power in a number of countries and appointing prime ministers in Hungary, Poland and Italy, the Left has made such inroads only in Greece so far.

In Hungary, Poland and most recently in Italy, the populist radical Right in government represents an alternative to European Union policies not only when it comes to immigration and asylum rights, but also increasingly in economic policy. The renationalisation of parts of the banking sector, energy and utility companies, and attempts at decreasing the foreign ownership of the retail and media sectors in Hungary and Poland are a case in point, as are Italy's disregard for the EU's restrictive fiscal rules and the planned overhaul of the pension reform.

The Left has an opportunity to devise alternative economic policy proposals that will have as their aim the restructuring of the economy towards more popular democratic control. This task should not be limited to mere institutional fixes to improve representation, but more importantly it should refocus on governance and reposition the role of the democratic state in the economy, so that the wealth created is controlled and shared more progressively among the lower and middle classes. This would entail challenging the disciplining power of the EU institutional framework, including the Stability and Growth Pact and the Euro project itself, the competition and state aid rules, as well as the neoliberal orientation of policy coordination as part of the European Semester, in areas such as employment, welfare policy and income taxation.

This programme will require manoeuvring between the pro-EU opinions of domestic populations, while at the same time challenging restrictive EU rules through parliamentary measures, public campaigns and the discretionary power of the state. The key motivating factors behind this radical democratic agenda is not only the political challenge from the populist radical Right, but also increasing unequal development within individual member states and the developmental subordination of Southern and Eastern European economies.

Outside the EU, the Left needs to put national policymaking autonomy and the pursuit of an independent industrial strategy before EU membership. These measures need to be taken with a view to environmental sustainability, increased localisation of production, and economic cooperation, rather than competition, among European nations.

If democracy still matters for the Left and if it wishes to remain a significant democratic force, it has to challenge the constitutional and legal changes that have made the EU structures in the last two decades more techno-authoritarian, and start constructing an effective democratic alternative.

### **Philippe Marlière**

The Left's core value and *raison d'être* is enhancing equality of opportunities and outcomes for all. For as long there is a Left, this will remain so.

Conservatives, free-marketeers and fascists are not interested in fostering a more equal, tolerant and pluralistic environment for all: conservatives want to preserve a world of privileges on the pretence of defending traditions; free-marketeers above all pursue financial profit; and fascists, well, are fascists.

The commitment of the various components of the Left to achieving greater equality is an asset, as individuals aspire to a more fraternal and secure life. It has a problem, though: how do you promote and establish a 'more equal' and a 'fairer' society in a world saturated by capitalist exploitation, greed, competition, nationalism or sexism?

One achieves that goal through the active promotion of democracy, real democracy, not the debased and fake brand of democracy that we are spoon-fed from an early age. This pseudo-form of democracy largely consists of receiving an education to be compliant with a consumerist lifestyle and obedient to the main political institutions.

What is real democracy then? It can be direct or representative, popular, national, regional or local. It means that

every one of us, whatever our skills and merits, should have a real say in the political decision-making process. This is not to say that everyone should govern or be politically active. It entails that people should get a chance to understand how political decisions are reached, and actually stop them when they think that they are harmful to them.

Take neoliberalism: It has brought the far Right to power in several European countries, discredited the European project, enabled the Brexit swindle and impoverished millions across the world. From the 1970s onwards, it has been single-handedly imposed on the vast majority of people by a financial and political oligarchy that is unaccountable. This oligarchy has lied by arguing that the rich had to be made even richer to redistribute wealth to ordinary citizens.

How do you enact real democracy? There are no written rules about it. It could be any action limiting the power of politicians and keeping them in check such as the right to recall any of them (that should include the president or the prime minister), the strict application of parity in terms of gender representation in government and in political organisations, the use of referenda or participatory budgeting.

Finally, because the Left is committed to equality and real democracy, it can only distrust and despise power. Power is a means to an end and not an end itself. Any healthy democracy should dispense with the power-thirsty megalomaniacs who are in government and end up making important decisions affecting our lives.

### **Bice Miguashca & Andrew Schaap**

The obvious challenge for the Left, depicted as an already constituted political grouping, upholding a set of fixed policy attitudes, is how to win and hold political office. But if understood as a constitutive activity that only gains its meaning through the collective claims and practices of those who act in its name, the picture becomes more complicated, with left politics forced to answer three perennial questions: what it stands for, who it speaks for and how it should realise its emancipatory vision.

With respect to the first question, one key challenge stems from the ascendancy of 'populism' as the trope of the day and, with it, the view that we now live in a world defined by cultural cleavages, nationalist yearnings and illiberal practices. In this new context, the utopian imaginings of left activists are deemed irrelevant at best and a dangerous distraction at worst. In the UK, the ongoing intellectual tensions between Red and Blue Labour, as well as the short lived efforts to frame 'Corbynism' as 'left-wing populism' in 2017, highlight the difficulty of positioning left politics, ideologically, in an age of 'populist hype'. Only if left politics strongly resists the now trendy but false opposition between populism and anti-populism will it be able to re-imagine a socialism for the 21st century.

Regarding the second question, the biggest threat to left politics is the apparent re-alignment of large sections of the working class to right-wing parties. But if no longer identifiable by class, then who is the rightful addressee of left activism today? With the bitterness of the Referendum vote still lingering and Brexit looming, the British Labour Party continues to struggle to define its core constituency torn between its overwhelmingly middle class, pro-EU membership and its voter-base, many of whom are working class and Brexit supporters. Complicating matters further, with an increasing body of ethnic minorities and women joining its ranks, the party is also coming under fire, from some quarters, for seemingly prioritising identity politics over class politics. Once again, only if left politics resists the false choice between 'class' and 'identity' politics will it be able to rebuild a sense of solidarity between all those marginalised by decades of austerity.

Finally, in terms of realising its vision, left politics in Britain is wrestling with the challenge of combining 'movementism' and 'parliamentarism', that is, building strong roots within civil society while pursuing electoral power within the State. The first task requires a strategy which reaches out to neglected communities, listens and

learns from grassroots activists and transforms and enfold them into the Left's electoral base. Labour, with the help of Momentum, has begun this project with some earnest. As for the second task, proposals for a 'progressive alliance' among left parties is more controversial. So far, Labour has remained steadfastly tribal in its outlook, spurning the Green Party's overtures to cooperate electorally. On this, as above, left politics must resist the false choice between demonstrating fitness for government and mobilising for social change, and commit instead to a coalitional politics within, between and beyond political parties.

### **Benjamin Opratko**

As usual, a short answer to a big question will have to begin with a disclaimer: It depends.

In a very general sense, the biggest challenge for the Left is that capitalism seems to increasingly rely on authoritarian forms of state power for political regulation and stability. As Antonio Gramsci once put it, capital has to organise its hegemony, i.e. carefully calibrate 'the combination of force and consent, which balance each other reciprocally, without force predominating excessively over consent'. When the material resources for the organisation of consent (such as decent wages and purchasing power for significant segments of the working class and a welfare state providing some level of social security) become scarce, the ruling classes will have to recalibrate this 'combination of force and consent' – for example by mobilising racist and authoritarian sentiments. This is what Gramsci calls a 'crisis of hegemony', or 'crisis of authority'. In such crises, authoritarian parties and movements can thrive, promising to restore order.

This is no automatism, as we can witness in Europe today. 'Europe' is a deeply fragmented political space. While in some parts of the continent, parties and movements of the Left have been able to channel the crisis of hegemony in progressive ways, in other places we are faced with a far Right which has successfully reorganised hegemonic rule as authoritarian populism. This is the case in many countries that had been part of the Eastern Bloc before 1989, such as Hungary or Poland. More recently, Austria and Italy have joined the club.

In Austria, a far-right coalition government took office after the elections in October 2017. Since then, they have launched unprecedented attacks on the welfare state and workers' rights and threatens civil liberties and democratic institutions. In the past year, they have introduced a law extending maximum working hours from 10 to 12 hours per day and from 40 to 60 hours per week. Currently they plan to cut social benefits and introduce labour market reforms modelled after the German 'Hartz IV' regime, which has produced a large precarious low-wage sector in the past decade. These measures are accompanied by permanent racist campaigns against migrants, refugees and Muslims living in Austria, the infiltration of police, military and secret services by far-right cadre, and increasing political pressure on the media.

Under these conditions, the Left finds itself in an extremely difficult position as it has to permanently react to the Right's initiatives. It is forced to defend a status quo, the social and democratic institutions of the bourgeois state that are themselves far from perfect – and it mostly fails anyway. Caught up in defensive battles, the Austrian Left seems unable to develop a positive vision and strategy for the future that goes beyond the (impossible) return of the Fordist welfare state. It needs a set of proposals that tackle the great challenges of the coming decades: avoiding climate disaster, reorganising productive and reproductive work, adapting democracy for the reality of mobile subjects. Only then can it develop a real alternative both to both technocratic 'TINA' neoliberalism and the regressive, authoritarian fantasies of the Right.

### **Antonis Vradis**

I like to think back to a time – not that long ago, in the broader context of things – when it was much easier to discern



who was on the Left and who was on the Right, and what the right thing to do was for everyone, depending on where they stood along this cognitive line. Simpler times, in a way, even though their brutality does not really leave much space for positive reminiscence of any kind. Yet surely enough, those brutal times made for stark divides – and these made, in turn, questions of the kind you are posing here way easier to handle: ‘Who’s on the Left’ is simpler to see when you are faced with the option of taking to the mountains in Greek partisan resistance, facing exile, torture or death.

And the ‘what to do’ question was sorted in a way, too – resist, even if victory in the sense of liberation from the occupying force or the restoration of anything resembling a democratic apparatus seemed like a fleeting fantasy. Today, of course, we live through a time riddled with a great historical irony. At the exact time when the two camps fighting for hegemony over the course of the past century have now morphed into a disoriented, single blob of introvert confusion, the Left (in its broader sense: the wide church of those fighting for a better world, from a socially progressive angle) are equally sucked and lost into this blob. The lethal calamity of ‘realism’ drags progressive governments into submission to an all-encompassing system that is, ironically, on its own last stand.

If there is one challenge for ‘the Left in Europe’, then, surely this must be to get rid of these two small words from its mindset: this ‘of’, and this ‘in’. To stop thinking of itself as a force to the left ‘of’ the mainstream, which it has to somewhat lure into an attractive enough proposition, as if by doing so History’s great clogs may ever stop or even change direction. And it has to stop thinking of itself as a Left ‘in’ Europe, as if it is forever historically bound to the great fallacies brought about by social democracy in our continent, and as if it has to limit itself to the thought traditions that stemmed from this land.

### **Catherine Samary**

The Left of the 21st century is to be built, at the European level, not to oppose but on the contrary to consolidate, on democratic and egalitarian basis, all people’s rights. Such an orientation is as much against globalised market competition as against nationalist xenophobic currents turning public distress against scapegoats.

The defence of national, social and democratic rights for all should be transformed into democratic rebellions coordinated as much as possible at a European level, imposing a critical balance-sheet of existing Treaties and alternative concepts. This should be combined with democratic struggles of disobedience to rules established in a non-democratic way (in national or European institutions as much as through transnational Treaties) which are destructive to rights and to the planet.

The lack or weakness and divisions of the European Left (which have been dramatic for the Greek people) should be overcome. Disobeying on a progressive, equal and European basis is the only way to oppose both a destructive kind of (Non)Union and the increasing far-right logics turning popular unrest against ‘the Other’ – the (Islamic) ‘invader’, the racialised peoples, the ‘not real citizens’ supposed to threaten the national or European ‘identity’.

A European Left should express dominant popular aspirations for an alternative Union generalising (instead of destroying) all the progressive gains of the past, organising solidarities and democratic choices instead of generalising competition, and fiscal and social dumping. It should denounce, not on a nationalist but rather a democratic and internationalist basis, the increasing authoritarian role of non-elected European bodies (‘Eurogroup’, the European Commission, the Central Bank and European Council).

This authoritarian and regressive trend, presented as an improvement of federal European construction, is at the root of the on-going crisis of the EU. Such a (Non)Union is incapable of dealing in a progressive way with the so-called

â€˜refugee crisis' because it destroys all kinds of equal rights and solidarity for its own peoples. It involves policy that Macron pretends is â€˜European' and â€˜progressive' against Italian or Hungarian governments. A European Left should demystify such a false dilemma and ideological presentations.

A European Left should oppose all myths about the European past. It should reinvent the words of communist emancipation, resisting all reduction of past revolutions to the Gulag as much as all capitalist â€˜TINA' (There Is No Alternative) ideology and all relations of oppression, discrimination and domination (with their class, gender, racist, cultural and political dimensions). The self-organisation of all communities directly concerned by those oppressions and a pluralist radically democratic way of debating and acting are pre-conditions to the emergence of a left alternative hegemonic â€˜block'.

It has to overcome in a positive way the existing crisis of â€˜politics', inventing concrete forms of democratic (egalitarian) functioning. This is both needed for new forms of socio-political organisations and fronts, and to illustrate in a concrete manner possible alternative ways of organising a society that protects human, social rights and the environment at all articulated territorial levels.

### **Andrzej ?ebrowski**

Andrzej ?ebrowski has been a revolutionary socialist since 1973. Supporter of the politics of the International Socialist Tendency. Editor of Pracownicza Demokracja (Workers' Democracy): <http://pracowniczademokracja.org/>

Today the racist and even fascist Right are making gains in many countries, and their demonstrations are increasingly common. The political setup has been shaken to the core. In many cases, support for the old established parties has virtually disappeared.

In the former Eastern Bloc countries we have also seen the intensification of far-right and racist hate campaigns against Muslims, Jews, Roma, migrants and refugees. Meanwhile, the election of people like Donald Trump in the US, Duterte in the Philippines and now Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil shows that the rise of the racist Right is a global – not just European – phenomenon.

These developments are rooted in the global crash of 2008-2009. Since mainstream parties exist to manage capitalism they cannot blame those at the top of society. Instead we have an increase in scapegoating. This allows the far-right to gain even more support.

The key class division that shapes the global system is this: on one side we have the heads of big corporations, financial institutions and states – and their international bodies such as the European Union – on the other we have the class of wage earners. Profits come from the exploitation of workers. The power of ordinary people is therefore expressed most effectively when workers fight back.

What does this mean for the Left? We have to recognise that we are in the majority. Most people are not vicious racists and they abhor fascism. The Left's strength lies in building campaigns, street demonstrations and support for strikes. We have recently seen huge antiracist demonstrations in countries like Germany and Britain.

We must not make concessions to racism. Some say that â€˜we have to listen to people's concerns' about migrants. But there is a huge difference between people's real concerns about bad housing, poor wages and awful working conditions and racist lies about immigration disseminated from the top of society. The Left must be clear that racism is not an automatic reaction to people wanting to live in another country.

## One Question: The European Left

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The Left must politically intervene in movements and workers struggles and should recognise that parliamentary elections can be a way of strengthening them – but can never be a substitute for them.

International solidarity is vital – otherwise our rulers will always be able to undermine our struggles with the lie that we share common interests with them. Our class is international. The most important foundation for this internationalism is to welcome immigrants.

The fake internationalism of the fundamentally undemocratic European Union cannot be a means to building such solidarity. Its policies have directly caused the drowning of thousands of people in the Mediterranean.

The Left should have its own international coordination as exemplified by the international mobilisation for the anti-racist demonstrations marking UN anti-racism day on or around March 16, 2019.

The Left must undermine the ruling ideology by stressing class solidarity as against the phoney idea of national interest. Popularising Marxist ideas is vital to defeating the ideologies reinforcing oppression and exploitation.

Above all, the radical and revolutionary Left must organise with people who do not share all our views but want to fight on specific issues such as antiracism, antifascism, a woman's right to choose, LGBT+ rights and of course workers' strikes. Otherwise the Left will remain small and our struggles will be weakened.

Remember, we ordinary working class people are the majority.

### **Marco Vanzulli**

European left movements should grow together, making a common judgement on the economic model enacted by EU institutions. A process like that had begun once; but now has stopped. The European Left is generally defeated or on the defence (even though there are certain countertrends, such as the government in Portugal or Corbyn's Labour Party in the UK), more closed than ever in its national boundaries.

On one hand, the social-democratic model seems to have exhausted its long trajectory. Generally speaking – but keeping especially in mind the Italian case and its recent history – this model was favoured due to economic growth (the so-called 'thirty glorious years') and transversal alliances between political parties, and European social-democratic parties became trans-class organisations. When, in the nineties, the economic trends changed, the European Left had lost connection with the living forces of labour and were no longer prepared to stand up for the working classes. They emulated the ideological discourse of 'TINA'.

On the other hand, on the left of the Left, other parties rose, in some cases having a significant impact on civil and political life. But considered as a general historical trend, they ended up sharing the fate of the social-democratic parties. This happened because these leftist parties maintained the central axis of their action through electoral competition, so their first priority was to make electoral agreements. This is why they failed, wrongly imagining they could keep on using the old social-political forces and the old forms of political representation. It was difficult for them to change the habit of branding as workerism the movements that stayed on the side of labour. Society and its forces had changed.

New political associations arose, on the Right, or claiming to belong to an indistinct zone beyond Left and Right (anti-establishment movements in Mediterranean Europe). The so-called populist movement and parties have increasing consensus, but also electoral abstention has reached unprecedented levels. The point at stake, in the

so-called post-democratic epoch, is representative democracy. Anti-establishment movements claim credit for having put direct citizenship at centre stage as a new form of democracy.

If there is a lesson to learn from the fall of the Left in Europe it is that real socialist democracy is a democracy from below, and has to differentiate itself from the 'direct democracy' claimed by anti-establishment movements. A future for the Left depends on the formation of new, autonomous movements from below. Beyond the anti-establishment ideology of pure citizenship and homogeneous (trans-class) civil society, the Left has to devise and carry out new activities focusing on labour exploitation and its conditions, class composition, and connecting national and European class differences in a world order that relegates entire peoples to the side-lines. A task that only a real Left can take upon itself.

### **Catarina Prncipe**

2015 was, in many ways, a defining year for the Left in Europe. The hope that a SYRIZA-led government sparked was counterbalanced by its later capitulation to European powers. But the Greek process opened new debates and revealed the need for fresh political positions.

Up to that point, while it was true that several left-wing traditions had always been critical of the processes of EU-integration and its neoliberal nature, it is also fair to say that most left-wing parties had a more positive approach to the EU as such. Mainly, the parties of the European Left stood for reform of the Union and dismissed the necessity of breaking away from it. However, after 2015, as the mask of the Union fell, left-wing parties needed a clearer stance on the matter. This was only partly achieved, and this debate – far from being resolved – is today at a new level.

Secondly, it might be fair to say that the situation in Greece signalled the beginning of the end of parties in the (now liberalised) traditional social-democracy, a process we now call 'Pasokification'. Although it is still uncertain how they will find strategies of revitalisation, this poses a central question for the Left. If one of the central aims of what we call 'new left parties' is to win over the discontented support base of traditional SD parties, the truth is that, despite their erosion, this process is not happening. In fact, some left-wing parties have taken the route of indirectly helping their revitalisation (see Portugal or the Spanish State). Leaving grand considerations aside, if the Left is to grow beyond the results it achieves today, it needs programmes and practices that profoundly distinguish it from the parties of the 'extreme-centre' who were mainly responsible for neoliberalisation and austerity.

Thirdly, any left-wing project that aims for state power must be built upon the strength of the streets and organised labour. This is, of course, not a new idea. But it might be one of the less debated lessons from Greece. I believe it is impossible to understand SYRIZA's successes (and later defeats) without understanding the central importance of the movements in their (complex) relationship with the party. If the Left is to build sustained basis and support, it cannot rely on volatile electoral moments. Relying on elections not only makes us think we are stronger than we actually are, it actually substitutes strategy for tactics, transforming an instrument (elections) into an end in itself. Moreover, practical solidarity made into political action should also be an inspiration for how to fight the growth of the far-right.

Trying to sum up all these dilemmas, I would briefly answer that the Left needs programmes and demands, at the level of the nation-state, that can actually end austerity (even if they clash – and they will – with the EU), a reorientation towards grassroots and labour organisation, networks of practical solidarity, and international coordination built upon the encounter of all these political subjects.

### **Mikkel Bolt Rasmussen**

The emergence of a strong nationalist and post-fascist movement in Europe, from Scandinavia to Great Britain, Germany and France, Holland to Italy and Greece, presents a tremendous challenge to the building of a revolutionary movement in Europe that can ally itself with the remains of revolutionary movements in North Africa and the Middle East. The square occupation movement and the anti-austerity protests across Europe since 2011 constitute a very important turning point after an almost 30-year period of one-sided class war. Although there has been a huge amount of 'bad timing' involved across national borders that has made it very difficult to create alliances, the refusal of the status quo points towards a possible new revolutionary perspective. This perspective is still very nascent and very fragile, and the capitalist states are doing their best to prevent its vision of a different world.

Confronted with the re-emergence of post-fascism it is important not to get caught in the anti-fascist trap where the Left postpones its critique of capitalism to collaborate with seemingly anti-fascist forces across the political spectrum. Fascism is something inherent in the national democratic system and it appears in times of crisis to steer the break-down and avoid any serious challenge to the capitalist mode of production. It has a clear counter-revolutionary function. A critique of post-fascism must then include critique of the national democratic system. This critique might necessitate a critique of the very term 'the Left' and how that term helps reproduce the western national democratic system.

The Left-Right political spectrum is a huge problem for the revolutionary perspective and more often than not tends to distort discussion and preclude any radical critique of capitalism. The way the Left-Right division is used creates political sympathies based on unconscious political reflexes. The political effect of this dichotomy in Western Europe is often a very surprising equal division between those voting Left and Right. This is not the effect of a corresponding uniformity in the social constitution of these states; it is instead caused by the Left-Right model's mathematical logic. The figure produces a polarisation of the population, which cuts across social groupings. The population is split into two more or less equal political groups who are by definition opposed to each other. The polarisation inherent in this dichotomy 'naturally' privileges the centre and political compromise.

The problem is, of course, that the capitalist mode of production is anything but moderate! It is radical in the sense of going to the core of things. Life in the most basic sense – people, the Earth and the biosphere – is being threatened by capitalist production. The solution ought to be as radical – the negation of the capitalist system. But within the Left-Right political spectrum, radicalism and the revolutionary perspective takes on the form of 'extremism', which is loaded with negative associations and is portrayed as blind passion and terror. The abolition of the capitalist system is thus abandoned. The fear of extremism functions as a deterrent to thinking (through matters). The result is that 'the Left' functions as a guarantee for the continuation of current political thinking. In that sense, the important distinction is not one between Left and Right but between being for or against communist revolution.

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