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European Union

When the Plan B is the Plan A

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The conference for a plan B, which was held in Madrid from 19 to 21 February 2016 (for the Appeal see below, for the Statement from the conference see [Declaration For a Democratic Rebellion in Europe](#)), is the most important international policy initiative in the Europe of austerity, following on other meetings of this type, whose profile and audience were more restricted. It aimed to articulate political and social alternatives and to project strategic debates on a European scale. As necessary as it is difficult, the international arena has been a space for struggle, exchanges and reflection in the chiaroscuro period that followed the year 2011, "the year in which we dreamed dangerously" as Slavoj Žižek has baptized it.

The movements that erupted in 2011 constituted a wave of global protests, formed of national movements with specific characteristics, although they strongly influenced each other and came together, in their ideas and symbolically. The framework of the contestation of the last five years has been that of the state and/or nation (where the two do not coincide), marked as much by opposition to state and regional governments as to the Troika (rather towards the former in the Spanish case, towards the latter in the Greek and Portuguese cases).

Absorbed by the scale of their respective national-state crises, the movements, organizations and campaigns of the countries of the European periphery have not generated a dynamic of intense international collaboration, and there have not been many successful major initiatives aiming at cross-border articulation. There have been meetings and projects, but all with limited impact and few practical consequences. Some of them were driven by the new social movements that emerged in the wake of 15M, such as the Agora 99 meetings in Madrid (in November 2012) and Rome (in November 2013). Whereas others involved collaboration between new "indignant" networks and the remains of the global justice movement, such as Firenze 10 + 10 (in November 2012) or the Altersummit in Athens (in June 2013). Until now, the main coordinated mobilization against the effects of the crisis remains the United for Global Change day of action on October 15, 2011, under the leadership of the 15M of the Spanish state, but there was no real continuity.

In parallel, there was the traditional inability of the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) to offer a response to the austerity imposed by the European integration project on which the ETUC has always been heavily dependent, on the ideological, organizational and economic levels. Abstract and unilateral Europeanism on the one hand, and on the other, collaboration through a European pseudo-"social dialogue" prevents the ETUC from articulating an alternative to the Europe of capital. The institutionalization of trade-union action thus has its European corollary in the form of an integration that is subject to the logic of the project of the European Union, which leads to the impotence and paralysis of combative trade-union action on a continental scale.

The weakness of coordinated international action contrasts with the "global justice years", from the birth of this movement in 1999 at the WTO summit in Seattle until 2003-2004, during which time the global justice movement was a defined and visible actor, able to act in an articulated manner at the international level as well as being a shared symbolic reference. The global justice wave was much more "epidermal" than the indignation against austerity that began in 2011 and it only scratched the surface of the social structure, but it projected itself by definition in the international arena, demonstrating an unprecedented, albeit fleeting, dynamic on this level. From 2005, the global justice movement ceased to be a reference and a catalyst for social resistance. International campaigns and mobilizations lost their centrality and their ability to mobilize people. The axis of the protests shifted to the national/state and local level. The main structures of the global justice movement, such as the Social Forums, have lost touch with national realities, becoming distant from the real processes. The legacy of the "global justice years" has not however disappeared, because it is found in many thematic and sectoral international initiatives (campaigns, days of global action ...), but with a moderate impact and limited activist base. The exception was the birth of the

movement in favor of 'climate justice' following the COP15 summit in Copenhagen in 2009, which benefited from high visibility and met a certain echo (which continued, in an uneven way, during subsequent summits), with however the underlying problem of disconnection with national and local resistance against neoliberal austerity, where the state of social emergency has overshadowed the ecological reformulation of the present economic model.

At the present time, the national/state and international levels are dislocated: on the one hand movements and organizations with a narrow social base which aim at international action, disconnected from concrete national/state and local mobilizations, while on the other fighting movements are focused on national and local emergencies in the face of the bulldozer of budget cuts. From this flows a dual challenge: to give international activism territorial roots and to propel national struggles beyond borders. In other words, to articulate the national/local with the international and European - and vice versa.

All this does not detract from the importance of certain experiences of international protest in the heart of the Europe of austerity, such as the Blockupy days of action since 2012; forms of coordination that are not very visible but which are useful for the exchange of experiences; organizations that push for citizen debt audits as part of the International Network for Citizen Audit (ICAN in English). And especially the growing and persistent international campaign against the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (TTIP), the biggest and most global ongoing initiative, which somehow combines the heritage of the global justice movement with that of the phase that began with the crisis of 2008 and the popular explosion of 2011.

Nor has the geopolitics of socio-political resistance contributed to an international articulation, because its epicentre is in the peripheral countries, with Greece, the Spanish State and Portugal at the forefront, with a relatively low degree of internationalization of its movements and social organizations and a limited real and symbolic capacity to impel a dynamic of Europeanisation of the struggle. This contrasts with the global justice period, in which there was France (from the strikes of November-December 1995 against the "reform" of social security to the popular explosion against the First Employment Contract - CPE - which aimed to push young people into precarious work, in 2006); and there was Italy (from the counter-summit in Genoa in July 2001 to the movement against the war in 2003, through the demonstration of the CGIL in March 2002 against the amendment to Article 18 of the Workers' Statute, an article that restricted the right of employers to dismiss workers). These two countries are currently in a situation of low levels of social resistance, of decomposition of the political left and a rise of the far right in France and of demagogic alternatives without content in Italy. France and Italy play an important role not only in European geopolitics, but also within the left itself. There can be no doubt that to Europeanize the struggle from the Iberian and Hellenic Mediterranean periphery is more difficult than to do so from the Franco-Italian axis.

Thinking about the rupture after Syriza

Plan B was born from the shock of the capitulation of Tsipras before the Troika, which really threw a bucket of cold water on the hopes for change but which was also a source of strategic lessons ... so as to avoid tripping twice over the same rock, even if the rock on question is on another path or in another country.

During the global justice period, social resistance did not consider the necessary "political question". It was not directed towards the formation of new political instruments, remaining in a logic of self-sufficiency and social movementism. The global justice currents placed themselves either in a perspective of influencing the institutions (by the moderate method of lobbying or by mobilizing in the streets) or in a logic of "changing the world without taking power" (as in the title of the famous book by John Holloway), oriented towards exodus or a permanent counter-power. Despite this, the global justice radicalization also shifted the political-electoral space and created more favourable conditions for the left opposed to neoliberalism, favouring the emergence of political parties and initiatives which, with different kinds of programmatic and organizational crystallization, expressed electorally the

discontent of a minority fringe of society. But the attempts to articulate them at EU level did not go beyond formal links or simple frameworks for discussion.

In the field of forces that was evolving in the milieu of the communist (or post-communist) parties, with the exception of the orthodox KKE and PCP in Greece and Portugal, the Party of the European Left (EL) was constituted, under the political and moral authority, first of Rifondazione Comunista (the reference of this political field from the counter-summit in Genoa in July 2001 until its self-immolation when it entered the Prodi government in 2006) and then of Die Linke in 2007. But the EL has not gone beyond the stage of being a space for summit meetings of national/state political forces, with little European visibility, a low capacity for joint action, enormous contradictions and strategic limitations as well as a dependency on the needs and tactical turns of the flagship party of the moment.

In the anti-capitalist field, from the early 2000s, there arose the Conferences of the European Anti-capitalist left (EACL). With a considerable influence of the French LCR (in the European Parliament since 1999 and whose presidential candidate, Olivier Besancenot, won 4.25 per cent in 2002), and the participation of the Scottish Socialist Party, the Portuguese Left Bloc, the Danish Red-Green Alliance (the latter two also members of the EL), Rifondazione in the early stages and various minor forces from other countries, the Conference held regular meetings with a limited format for several years, but they did not lead to anything more. In 2008, on the occasion of the fortieth anniversary of May 1968 and in the midst of the process of the launching of the New Anti-Capitalist Party (NPA) by the LCR in France, new meetings of radical forces were convened. But the subsequent crisis and decline of the NPA, as well as the loss of the centrality of France in social struggles following the outbreak of the financial crash, put an end to this second attempt.

The pressures of the specific conditions in each country, the immediate emergencies, were not always concordant for each political force, the national/state logic of electoral competition (with the partial exception of the European elections), the disconnect between the political and the social of the previous period, as well as crises, the flux and reflux corresponding to a historic moment of transition, from which a number of parties that served as points of reference for various parts of the left (Rifondazione, Die Linke, the NPA and more recently Syriza) suffered, explain the very limited balance sheet of cross-border European coordination on the level of political parties since the beginning of the new millennium.

Plan B now appears as a socio-political initiative in which political forces and social organizations coexist, and where political and strategic discussions take place, in a format that mixes party political thinking and social activism and which combines the echoes of the social forums and those of the occupation of squares and other places. However, it is faced with a scenario where the forces in favour of a break with austerity show a very unequal development at European level, taking shape in very diverse experiences and evolving in a global context where, in most countries of the continent, with the exception of those which have seen unfold decisive processes of struggle, the social malaise is channeled by the far right. Few political forces can today push towards a Europeanisation of strategic thinking about a rupture, even more so since the main experiences are at the geopolitical periphery, not only of the EU, but also of the European left itself. "The Syriza hope" evaporated in record time, and Popular Unity in Greece failed in its attempt to articulate a defensive alternative to Tsipras. The Portuguese Left Bloc lacks sufficient outreach in Europe and Podemos has not had, since its foundation, beyond its relationship with Syriza and some public figures of the international left, an active policy on the European terrain. As for the Labourism of Corbyn or the Scottish independentist left represented by RISE (Respect, Independence, Socialism and Environmentalism - Scotland's Left Alliance, established in August 2015) they are partially situated outside the perimeters of the continental dynamics, too far away to pull the wagon.

The challenges

After the Madrid conference, Plan B faces two major challenges in the context of the absence of political forces and social movements which have so far been able to act as levers or as international motor forces of resistance and alternatives. The first consists of developing a consistent critique of austerity policies and the EU, not limited to too superficial approximations. It is a question of knowing how to manage a huge variety of approaches on key issues (the euro, the analysis of the EU, conceptions of political and social change ...) whose fundamental agreement lies in the rejection of a "Tsipras path" of capitulation to the power of finance. But this is only the beginning, the starting point. The arrival point should be the formulation of shared plural strategic horizons that traces an alternative path of rupture. A rupture which is the precondition for positive change.

The second is to formulate practical tasks that go beyond simply organizing new meetings. We must strengthen international campaigns or global days of mobilization that offer a concrete perspective for a new internationalism from below. This is where the process of European Social Forums began to mark time, being incapable, beyond launching the day of action on February 15, 2003 against the war in Iraq, of moving on from conferences and their preparation to a phase of launching campaigns and joint actions. For that, the convening of an international day of action for May 28, 2016 is an excellent initiative which synthesizes both the significance of the social struggles of the last five years and the attempts to build new political instruments. The challenge is as simple as it is ambitious: to synchronize hopes and efforts across borders.

Barcelona, February 22, 2016

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Plan B for Europe: Appeal to build a European area of work in order to end austerity and build a true democracy

In July 2015, we witnessed a financial coup d'état carried out by the European Union and its institutions against the Greek Government, condemning the Greek population to continue suffering the austerity policies that had been rejected on two occasions in the polls. This coup has intensified the debate over the power of the EU, and by extension its institutions, its incompatibility with democracy, and its role as guarantor of the basic human rights demanded by European citizens.

We know that there are alternatives to austerity. Manifestos such as "For a Plan B in Europe", "Austerexit" or DiEM25 (Democracy in Europe Movement 2025) denounce the blackmail of the third memorandum of understanding imposed against Greece, the catastrophe that it would cause and the antidemocratic nature of the EU. The President of the European Commission no less, Jean -Claude Juncker, said : " There can be no democratic decision against European treaties ".

We are also witnesses to the unsupportive, and at times xenophobic, response from members of the EU, and its institutions, to the arrival of refugees from the Middle East and Africa and to the human drama that entails. Underlining the hypocrisy of the debate within the EU with respect to the humanitarian disasters is the indirect way in which, through the sale of arms or by pushing its trade policies, the EU has been a key player in the conflicts which have in turn provoked the recent humanitarian crises.

The EU's solution to the crisis, started eight years ago and based on austerity, privatizes common goods and destroys social and labour rights instead of addressing the root causes of the crisis; deregulation of the financial system and the corporate takeover of EU institutions through the employment of powerful lobbies and revolving door

policies. The EU promotes false solutions by negotiating trade and investment treaties, with hardly any transparency or democratic oversight, such as the TTIP, CETA, or TISA, that eliminate what are considered to be barriers to trade: the rights and regulations that protect the citizens, workers, or environment. It's the final blow to our democracies and rule of law, especially regarding the procedures put in place for so called investor protection

The current EU is governed by a de facto technocracy serving the interests of a small, but powerful, minority of economic and financial powers. This has provoked a resurgence of rhetoric from the far right as well as from xenophobic and nationalist factions in many European countries. We have the responsibility to react against this threat and stop fascists from capitalize on the pain and unhappiness of the citizens, who in spite of everything have shown solidarity towards the hundreds of thousands of refugees that are suffering this humanitarian tragedy.

Society has now started to work towards a radical change in the policies of the EU. Social movements, such as Blockupy, the current campaign against the TTIP (Transatlantic Trade and Investment Agreement between the European Union and the United States), the Alter Summit, the European general strike in 2012, the Euromarches, or the massive amount of work carried out by numerous citizen groups and NGO's make up valuable human, intellectual, and ideological capital in the defense of human rights, the respect of The Earth, and of the dignity of people over and above political and economic interests. However, we believe that better coordination and cooperation is needed in order to mobilize at a European level. **There are many proposals on the table that could do away with austerity:** a fair tax policy and the closure of tax havens, complementary exchange systems, the re-municipalization of public services, the equal distribution of all jobs with a and enshrining fair conditions. commitment to a production model based on renewable energies and reform or abolish the EU tax treaties – formally known as the Treaty on Stability, Coordination and Governance in the Economic and Monetary Union. The example of Greece has shown us that in order to face the current circumstances we must join forces, all the Member States and from all their spheres: political, intellectual and the civil society. Our vision is all-inclusive and international. For these reasons we want to generate a To carry out all these proposals in order to redefine and re-establish political and European institutions and treaties, civil society must be organized, we must think our common strategies and see how to articulate them. We know that these transformations cannot be done in isolation from each of the European countries. Our vision is of solidarity and internationalist.

For this reason we want to create a convergence of all the people, movements, and organizations that oppose the current model of the EU and agree to a common agenda of objectives, projects, and actions, **with the aim of breaking the EU wide system of austerity and to radically democratize the European Institutions, putting them to work for the citizens.**

With this idea in mind we propose to set up a European conference on 19th, 20th and 21st February in Madrid and we invite you to participate in the debates, workshops and discussions that will take place.

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