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Their battle and ours

28 June 1997, by The Editors

Between 1986 and 1990 two crucial decisions of a strongly political nature were taken: to establish the single market and move towards a single currency. From something marginal and gradual, the process of European unification has moved to political centre stage. European economies are being harmonised and a supranational (mini-)state is being built from above. In the current political and economic conjuncture, this state will be born undemocratic and its policies will be anti-social.

The EU is being built behind people's backs and against the working classes. The 'Social Charter' put forward (but only feebly defended) by the European trade unions has been kept out of the Maastricht Treaty. As a result, the EU is being launched under the principle of 'Market uber Alles', without any European social norms. It is leaving the world of labour disarmed in the face of the neo-liberal onslaught. It is opening the door to across-the-board regression. The EU is not and will not be social! A new, wholly modern 'social question' is haunting Europe.

The big lie

Those who govern us are not unaware of the threat that this poses for 'civil peace', 'social cohesion' and the EU itself. 'Without popular support, Europe will not be built': they all sing. How do they reconcile this with austerity policies? By acting as if 'people don't understand' and paying for mammoth publicity campaigns. If the people have lost confidence in their rulers, it's time to elect a new people! And above all: it's time for big lies, faked statistics, and bluffs about the future. If you believe them, unemployment is falling, the economy is recovering, budgetary common sense has been restored, the monetary unionis a done deal, and the future looks glorious. This morally polluting smoke screen is indispensable for them so they can settle their business among themselves while anaesthetising peoples and proletarians.

The historical moment between 1989 and 1995 was brief, but deep and painful: the damage to the workers' movement and the advances made by the bourgeoisie are considerable. The workers' movement, which had continued resisting country by country, was reawakened in November-December 1995 by the magnificent struggle of the French workers and students. This was the first great strike against Maastricht, though in only one country.

European resistance

In spring 1997, the brutal shutdown of the Renault plant in Vilvorde, Belgium, with delocalisation planned to a cheaper location in the south of the EU, revealed to what point this Europe has been tailor-made for the bosses. The joint fightback by Belgian, French and Spanish workers showed that the lesson of the winter of 1995 had been learned: every major social struggle nowadays requires immediate solidarity on a European scale. Trade unionism will be European or it will not exist!

We are reaching a cross-roads. The great leap forward towards monetary union is accelerating. The anti-social burden is weighing heavier. At the same time, the EU is 'programming' the labour movement's calendar for us. It is binding together our goals and synchronising our struggles. It is lining up the adversaries in direct confrontation, obliging everyone to choose sides, and pushing each current and organisation to develop its analysis, programme and strategy.

In the last ten years, the EU's progress has meant a parallel progress for the neo-liberal agenda, to the point that this agenda is now written into the main EU treaties. This shows that 'uniting Europe' means two things: regulating relations among national states, but also choosing a social model. The choice is between: production for the profit of a few, or for the needs of the great majority. Between private and social ownership of the major means of production. Between private domination and popular self-management. Between unbridled competition and generalised

solidarity. Between pillage and exploitation of the Third World and generous co-operation for harmonious development on a planetary scale. These are two mutually exclusive analyses, two choices, two different roads to the future!

The tide is turning

'European unity' is not some great ideal: it is a concrete struggle. The dominant classes will mobilise all their powerful resources in order to win. But they have their problems as well. The world market economy, at the moment of its triumph, is not solving its crisis but aggravating it. Neo-liberal ideology is on the way out. The tide is slowly beginning to turn.

In Europe in particular, the bourgeoisie has several disadvantages relative to its Japanese and US counterparts. The European workers' movement is still incomparably stronger than in the USA or Japan. Nor does there exist a (European) national-chauvinist feeling comparable to that in Japan and the US.

The European bourgeoisies are asking European wage-earners, women and young people to limit their demands and subordinate their movements in the name of a common historic destiny, of the defence of the European 'social, humanist' model, of resistance to the almighty dollar, the invasion of Japanese products and Wild West capitalism.

This 'soft' rhetoric confirms that, behind the European Union, they are planning Fortress Europe and a European superpower. No-one should forget that the European bourgeoisies have a long history of power behind them; and that their brutal exercise has never been hindered by a certain degree of political and ideological refinement. The language of Europeanism achieves its goals only to the extent that the workers' movement is politically powerless and there is no credible anti-capitalist alternative. The battle for Europe is not cut off from the daily reality of class struggle!

Marxists should not let themselves be trapped in the false dilemma: either you are for Europe or you are against. The choice is not either the EU or nationalist reaction. From the moment of its birth, the socialist workers' movement has always been internationalist. As early as the late 19th century, Marxists understood that the national state was becoming too narrow to ensure a harmonious development of the economy and society.

We oppose the EU in the name of another Europe, not in the name of the national state. The EU is not a weapon against globalisation, it is part and parcel of globalisation. It does not hold back the 'Americanisation' of our societies, it fosters it.

Only a different Europe, a social Europe, a Europe that breaks with capitalism, will find the strength and spirit to eliminate the 'old demons' of our continent and create hope for the future.

EU treaties in the light of history

28 June 1997, by The Editors

The 20th century confirms it: two "world" wars, the holocaust against the Jews, fascism, nazism, resistance movements, civil wars, revolutions and counter-revolutions.

"Unifying Europe" means overcoming, or mastering, the strong contradictions between states, but also the contradictions between social classes. In reality, unification between states always takes place on the basis of a certain "choice of society." Either capitalist (market economy, based on private property and generalised competition, production for profit, hierarchy and social inequality), or socialist (a classless society without social inequality, production to satisfy the needs of the population, collective property and co-operation).

The socialist project was actually the first which tried to unite the continent, between 1916 and 1923. There was a real perspective of an international society without war, exploitation and national oppression.

Unfortunately, the revolts of the labouring classes against exploitative, authoritarian and murderous capitalist systems in Russia, Germany, Hungry, Italy, Rumania and Poland were violently repressed. The new Soviet Union found itself alone. Isolated. It soon fell under the control of the Stalinist dictatorship. The people of Europe were now presented with a great, but false, dilemma: "exploitation under a democratic capitalist system, or totalitarian pseudo-socialism."

Twenty years later, the Second World War ravaged Europe for the second time. The urgent need to control the explosive rivalries between France, Britain and Germany re-emerged. The problem is that these rivalries have deep historical and structural roots.

- France was catapulted to the high point of human history by the universal importance of the 1989 French Revolution. But the country was handicapped by a less powerful economy than its neighbours.

- Britain was the first modern empire, with its industries and its colonies, its financial networks and active diplomatic corps. But the country was in decline.

- Germany is a first rank economic power. But the country was handicapped by its late unification (during the 19th century) and its lack of colonies. Politically, the country was stigmatised by the ghosts of its history.

With the working class (briefly) on the offensive at the end of the war, the

new Europe is blocked on two sides. To the east is the Soviet Union, the cold war enemy. To the west, the United States: a former English colony, now the leading superpower.

Throughout the last 50 years, the dynamic of European unification has had an economic aspect, and an equally important politico-statecraft aspect. Sometimes one has been the main "lever," sometimes the other. On the social side, Europe's rulers have been obliged to make successive, important concessions to the working classes, which are massively organised, and often turbulent. These concessions have concerned employment, salary, trade union rights, and elements of economic democracy in the workplace.

More than ever before, Europe lives to the rhythm of intense internal and external contradictions, which can flare up at any moment (remember the tension caused by the fall of the Berlin Wall?). A dose of supra-national constraint, a transfer of part of national sovereignty to pan-European (state) institutions, capable of taking decisions which will be binding on all member states seems increasingly indispensable. It is the price for political stability and economic expansion.

The problem is that such a transfer has never taken place before, in Europe or elsewhere.

The bearable slowness of unification

A short historical detour explains the apparently mysterious difficulties, recurrent crises, and the interminable succession of European Treaties, each one more boring and confused than the last.

In 1947 the USA put a condition on their Marshall economic aid plan for Europe. Washington insisted that the participating European states form the Organisation for European Economic Co-operation (OEEC, later becoming the OECD). This was no philanthropic act. Rather, it was a way of advancing towards a "single market, without quantitative (external) restrictions to the movement of merchandise." The pressure came, most of all, from the booming American economy, which needed new outlets.

In fact, economic reconstruction was achieved not on the basis of a united Europe, but through the action of separate national states, each strongly marked by the Second World War.

In July 1952 the European Coal and Steel Community was formed [1] between France, Germany, the Benelux countries [2] and Italy. In a rare moment of frankness, this treaty admitted that the goal was "to replace secular rivalries with a fusion of essential interests," in the perspective of "a community between peoples long opposed by bloody divisions." [3]

The agreement effectively created a "common market" in two products. Overproduction of coal and steel was considered to have been a root cause of the recent war. Protectionism (restrictive practices, state subsidies, discrimination between producers from different member states, import tariffs and taxes) were forbidden. Quotas were established, and backed up with a generous subsidy system. For the first time, a European body (the "High Authority") received supra-national authority, in this precisely specified field.

This agreement was part of a broader economic and political mobilisation of the "free world" by the United States, which was preparing for a confrontation with the Soviet Union and China. Its own coal and steel production was insufficient, and it was clear that West-European production could not be boosted significantly without the support of the German economy. And this was unthinkable unless France would agree.

The participants in the European Coal and Steel Community would remain at the core of all subsequent integration activities.

Overstretching

The impressive success of the ECSC incited "Europeanist" circles to try to extend supra-national decision making. Butthey tried to bite off more than they could chew. Efforts between 1950 and 1954 failed spectacularly to create the planned European Defence Community. The stumbling block was the historic question of German re-armament. even within a wider European structure, this was still too unpopular. The political fall-out from this failure had a long-lasting effect.

The Treaty of Rome (1957) re-launched the integrationist initiative. It created the European Economic Community (EEC). The aim was to gradually establish a total common market, by abolishing internal barriers, and creating a common external tariff policy. The only supra-national interventionism introduced by the treaty was the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP).

The Treaty of Rome was based on the principles of economic liberalism. Employment, prosperity and other social objectives were mentioned, but they did not have the same weight as in documents from the 1940s. There was nothing in the Treaty of Rome to inflame the crowds, and nothing to frighten them either. It was essentially concerned with increasing commercial exchanges in Western Europe, and with political convergence between the six original members of the European Coal and Steel Community. The Treaty also made possible the creation of Euratom, through which European capitalism would try to catch up with the USA in nuclear technology and nuclear energy.

For the next thirty years (1957-86), there was little or no further European integration. The most significant event wasthe 1972 signing of a monetary agreement, which in 1978 became the European Monetary System. This was an attempt to stabilise the relationship between the different currencies of the EEC. It was a response to the American government's unilateral withdrawl from the Bretton-Woods agreements (1944-1971), which introduced a greater degree of turbulence into monetary and financial markets.

The shift to the European Union

A major shift took place between 1989 and 1992. The adoption of the Single European Act (1986) introduces 3,000 practical measures, designed to implement the general objectives specified in the Treaty of Rome. It specified a target date, 1 January 1993. The French social democrat Jacques Delors, President of the European Commission, convinced western Europe's dominant classes of the political importance of the project, and transformed it into a series of plausible policies. The neo-liberal wave of the Thatcher-Reagan years, and the major shift in the world situation represented by the fall of the Berlin Wall, the defeat of the working class in the East, and the political triumph of capitalism, cleared the path for the introduction of the single market.

Then came the Maastricht Treaty, adopted in December 1991, signed in March 1992, and coming into force in November 1993. Just as the European Monetary System explodes. Despite this, the Maastricht Treaty succeeds in giving the bosses' and governments' offensive sufficient coherence and energy to continue.

The de-regulation imposed by the Single Europe Act was not counter-balanced by restrictions and obligations in the social field. This places the working classes of the various member states in generalised competition with each other. The Maastricht Treaty's monetarist convergence criteria begin systematically undermining the welfare state.

The latest treaty is the Dublin Stability Pact, which aims to prevent future deviation from or challenge to this strategy.

The situation today

Monetary union implies the creation of real supra-national mechanisms, with a transfer of national sovereignty to an independent European bank. Monetary union is due to begin in1998. Meanwhile, the adhesion of several central and east European countries to the European Union implies extending the area covered by the single market.

These two processes give rise to a crucial question. How to maintain the political cohesion of a European Union which is facing contradictions within the core group over monetary union and its consequences, and which must at the same time deal with an immense geo-political region stretching from the Atlantic ocean to the frontiers of Russia, and from the North Pole to the Mediterranean.

The Inter-Governmental Conference has not answered this question. The challenge is huge. Barely 100 years after they established independent, imperialist states, will the German, French and British bourgeoisies now be able to take an unprecedented leap, abandoning part of their power, and creating a stable, supra-national state authority?

Footnotes

[1] The agreement was prepared in 1950, and signed in 1951.

[2] Benelux is an acronym for BElgium, NEtherlands, LUXemburg.

[3] Introduction to the Treaty.

The price of the Euro

28 June 1997, by Robert Went

When you go abroad on holiday, you won't have to change money any more. That's about the level of the argument.

This cheap story masks the logic on which the Euro is built: an austerity programme, which is not at all beneficial for the majority of the European population.

Countries that want to join the common currency have to abide by the Treaty of Maastricht (1991) and the Stability Pact of Dublin (1996). These two agreements makes the price of the Euro very high.

A few years of austerity and then...

For years now, all the EU countries have been caught in an almost permanent cycle of cuts and austerity, because the Maastricht Treaty requires among other things that the budget deficits of countries that want to join the common currency be reduced to 3% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) before 1 January 1998. The five convergence criteria of Maastricht are exclusively about money: not unemployment, social security or ecological norms. In other words, Maastricht style convergence of levels of inflation, interest rates, government debts and deficits will not lead to a decrease of the big gaps between EU members in unemployment and productivity rates or GDP per head.

The cuts are not over. At the end of 1996, EU states had an average budget deficit of 4.4%. [1] Only Luxemburg fulfilled all five of the Maastricht convergence criteria. These figures imply that EU member states will have to cut their expenses by a total of more then 1% of the all-European GDP, by the end of this year. Such an operationcan only be done at the cost of a rise in

unemployment and further destruction of social and collective services.

These cuts will also stifle the EU's (already mediocre) economic growth. One of the most cynical aspects of the whole business is that no economist can explain why a common currency can only function with budget deficits below 3%, or why deficits of 4 or 5, or even 6% are such an economic disaster.

...a few more

Those countries that manage to reduce their deficits to 3% and that fulfil the other Maastricht Treaty requirements about total government debt, inflation, interest rates and exchange rates, will still not be finished with austerity packages. The member states are forcing themselves and each other into a permanent state of budgetary anorexia that will not end until well into the next century.

The Stability Pact that was adopted during the Euro Summit in Dublin stipulates that state budgets must be reduced to 'close to balance' or balanced, so that when member states enter a recession, they will have room to manoeuvre. If they do cross the sacred 3% budget deficit limit, financial penalties as high as 0.5 percent of GDP will be imposed. The proceeds will be divided among the 'good' countries.

These austerity arrangements will continue to strengthen recessionary and deflationary dynamics in the EU after the introduction of the Euro, just as the convergence criteria of the Maastricht Treaty have done since 1992.

Uncontrolable bankers

The European Central Bank (ECB) will take all important monetary decisions totally independently. This powerful new institution will not be controlled, even formally, by governments or parliaments: the Maastricht Treaty explicitly forbids attempts to influence the ECB's policies. The Treaty also decrees that the ECB has one priority at all times: price stability (=low inflation) above all. This reflects the monetarist dogma that low inflation will automatically lead to more growth, and more growth will automatically lead to more employment.

A race to the bottom

There will actually be a great increase in competition between countries inside the Euro zone. The introduction of the Euro means that countries will no longer be able to manipulate interest rates, exchange rates, and budget policies in the pursuit of their economic policy priorities.

The Maastricht and Dublin agreements forbid it. But at the same time, there are no pan-European fiscal, monetary or co-ordination policies for coping with economic shocks or recessions after the Euro is introduced.

Labour, the least mobile production factor, will pay the price, in the form of unemployment, wage cuts, and more flexibilisation. And countries will compete even more than they do now to attract investments. The only tools available will be tax cuts for companies, megalomaniac infrastructure projects, cheapening the welfare state, and reducing ecological regulations. This will be a race to the bottom: to harmonisation at the lowest level.

Dangerous illusions

Social democratic and trade union leaders argue that a common currency will become a means for a re-launch of economic growth. More jobs and social policies, they claim, can no longer be guaranteed on a national level. Therefore we need to accept the Euro, and then work to change the priorities of the EU.

This argument is impossible to maintain, because the neo-liberal logic of the convergence criteria, the stability pact and the future ECB is inextricably woven into the various juridical rules and treaties.

Some social democratic politicians are beginning to become abit nervous as they realise that the European Central Bank will determine to a large extent the margins within which social and economic policies can be financed. The new idea is to propose more 'political control' by Econfin, the EU council of Ministers of Finance and central bankers of the member states. But this would only mean more power for another supranational executive organ: just as undemocratic and uncontrollable as the ECB.

For all these reasons, we should continue protesting against the introduction of the Euro. Opposition to a common currency is not a principled question, but a social and political choice. In itself a common currency and co-ordination of monetary, fiscal and budgetary policies could have big advantages. But the current project, the Europroject, leads only to more unemployment, increasing social polarisation, and the dismantling of the public sector. The Euro is being used as a crowbar for neo-liberal policies, for more deregulation, flexibilisation and austerity.

Opposing the Euro and the European Monetary Union because of their disastrous social consequences has nothing to do with nationalism or chauvinism. On the contrary, opposition is an essential part of working towards co-ordinated European-wide policies for a shorter work-week without loss of pay, more money for useful work in the public sector (transport, housing, education, health, environmental investments) and taxing of capital flows.

The Maastricht criteria

	Inflation	Interest rates	Deficit	Govt.debt
		(long term)	(% GDP)	(% GDP)
EMU target	2.6	8.8	-3.0	60
Austria	1.8	6.3	-3.9	70
Belgium	1.8	6.5	-3.4	130
Britain	3.0	7.9	-4.1	55
Denmark	1.9	7.2	-1.7	70
Finland	1.5	7.1	-2.6	59
France	2.1	6.3	-4.1	56
Germany	1.2	6.2	-3.8	61
Greece	7.9	14.8	-7.4	112

Ireland	2.2	7.3	-0.9	73
Italy	4.0	9.4	-6.8	124
Luxemburg	1.2	6.3	2.7	6
Netherlands	1.5	6.2	-2.2	79
Portugal	2.9	8.5	-4.0	65
Spain	3.6	8.7	-4.4	70
Sweden	0.8	8.0	-3.8	78

(Source: Annual Report of the Dutch Central Bank, April 1997)

Footnotes

[1] Estimate released in April 1997 by the European Monetary Institute (EMI), the predecessor of the future European Central Bank (ECB).

Economists against the EMU

28 June 1997

The economists state that they "anticipate with increasing concern the moment at which Europe's Economic and Monetary Union (EMU) enters its third phase".

"The Maastricht Treaty, which took effect on 1 November 1993, is imperfect in many ways, particularly in the areas of democracy, employment, income distribution, environment, and poverty reduction inside and outside the Union. In addition, the Treaty was based on dubious economic assumptions."

"Nothing has changed in the intervening years. On the contrary, implementation of this EMU is being accompanied by high costs, including growing unemployment and social tensions. The EMU is proving to be little more than a monetarist project. The "Stability Pact" agreed to in Dublin has confirmed this tendency, and even aggravated it: the manoeuvring room for fiscal policy, particularly for social and ecological purposes, has become narrower than ever."

"Rather than signalling the birth of a modern European welfare state, this EMU is creating the institutional framework for a further dismantling of national social and fiscal policy and of the European public sector. From a social, ecological and democratic point of view, this is undesirable. And the economic benefit is questionable. In itself a common currency could have benefits, but with this project the European Union is taking the wrong road. It is time to reflect, reconsider, and begin a critical discussion of Europe's economic agenda."

In co-operation with economists in other EU countries the initiators of the Dutch appeal have drafted an Open Letter that was published on the eve of the Amsterdam Euro Summit, signed by 331 economists in all EU countries.

For a social Europe

28 June 1997, by Maxime Durand

This terrible situation is the balance sheet of more than a decade of neo-liberal promises. The common market has not created the jobs that were promised, and it is difficult to see why the single currency would do any better. When charted, the rise of the unemployment rate looks like a staircase rising sharply with no place to catch one's breath.

The only exception is the second half of the 1980s, corresponding to a recovery whose gains were quickly erased;six million jobs were destroyed between 1991 and 1994. What's more, official figures have to be adjusted upwards toaccount for "discouraged" workers and those seeking full-time work but forced to take part-time jobs.

The worst thing is that those countries that had best managed to protect themselves from unemployment are now "catching up" to the European average. "Bad" capitalism is elbowing out the "better" variants. The most significant example is Germany, where there are more than 4.6 million unemployed today. Before re-unification, the unemployment rate in West Germany was 4-5%. Today it stands at 9% in former West Germany and 15% in former East Germany. The leap in unemployment is particularly marked in the Scandinavian countries that recently joined the European Union: in Finland, the unemployment rate jumped from 3.4% in 1990 to 18.4% in 1994; in Sweden it went from 1.8% to 9.8% during the same period.

Flexibility

The rise in unemployment is intertwined with the generalisation of job insecurity and growing flexibility that have led to a substantial gutting of the right to work. Unemployment exerts tremendous pressure on the status of workers, whether employed or not.

In all countries individual forms of employment are on the rise: independent work in Britain, homework and the informal sector. On the most insecure end of the scale, work in the informal sector often involves immigrant workers with neither residence or work permits (particularly in Italy and Spain).

Labour legislation has been overhauled, making all manner of "atypical" work contracts the norm, especially temporary work contracts. As a result, temporary work is on the rise throughout the EU. Spain holds the record; in 1994, one in three jobs was temporary. This type of employment now accounts for a large majority of new jobs created in all EU countries. This is not a transitory phenomenon, but a process aimed at making the entire labour market just as flexible as these new contracts.

Most European countries have implemented employment policies aimed at preserving or creating specific jobs for "targeted" sectors of the population, such as unskilled young people and the long-term unemployed. These "assisted" job categories put pressure on standard employment categories, and create a second-class status for young workers.

Labour legislation has been gradually reduced to an empty shell. Limits on workforce reduction have been eased, using the absurd argument that this will help companies hire workers. As the flexible work week has recently become the main demand of many employers, the legal definition of the length of the work week has been watered down. Now, hours are increasingly counted on a yearly basis and part-time work has been deregulated. Restructuring has led to a reduction of average company size and a generalisation of contracting out. A growing proportion of workers work in small companies, where it is more difficult for them to ensure their rights are upheld. Labour laws make it difficult for workers in small companies to get the appropriate representation.

Growing insecurity also affects wages, through the erosion of minimum wage and social standards, and the elimination of mechanisms such as salary indexing. The two-fold attack on the public sector and social security accelerate the overall decline in living conditions. Unemployment insurance programmes are themselves being eroded, with cuts being made to the duration and amount of benefits. All these factors taken together create discrimination on a number of levels.

Women and young people first

Youth unemployment adds disproportionately to the average rate of unemployment; one in four young people in the EU is currently unemployed.

Women account for 40% of the European workforce, but 48% of the unemployed. The rate of employment among women is rising faster — or, at least, dropping less quickly - than that of men. The rate of workforce participation for women aged 25-49 rose from 39% in 1970 to 69% in 1993. This rising tendency continues, but it is now characterised by an increase in part-time work, and a concentration of women workers in a few areas of the service sector and low-wage positions.

One in three women in the EU holds a part-time job, but this figure is 67% in Holland, 44% in Britain and 36% in Denmark. This increase in part-time employment is accompanied by a heightened segregation of women, who are forced to take part-time work, and kept on the lowest rungs of the hierarchy.

The classic argument that part-time work allows for greater compatibility between a woman's professional and family life, does not stand up to an examination of what is actually occurring. The work day and work week constantly change, and women are expected to work irregular hours including weekends. It is rather difficult to argue that this is the result of a woman's "free choice".

More to come

Armed with a neo-liberal analysis of the crisis, the EU's institutions are in favour of going even further in the same direction. "As far as the length and organisation of work are concerned, there is above all a need to expand the flexibility of work time. A mandatory, generalised and massive reduction of the work week would not be the appropriate solution." Neo-liberal thinkers promote the idea of growth "rich in job creation" achieved by the expansion of "variable" (Jacques Delors) and "differentiated" (French employers) work. They counterpoise this to any "top-down restrictive measures aimed at introducing a shorter work week through legislation." The goal, therefore, is to further increase job insecurity, especially part-time work for women.

Wages have to rise more slowly than productivity in order to re-establish profit levels. Social spending has to be reduced in order to balance state budgets. As for the unemployed, there is a need to "eliminate anything that might prevent a welfare recipient from accepting a job, and monitor more closely the recipient's desire and ability to take a job."

All signs point in this direction, especially the "stability pact" recently signed by EU members. The Europe of the Maastricht Treaty is by its very nature an anti-social Europe. And so, to propose "social" amendments to Maastricht is therefore wrongheaded and ignores the basic logic behind the treaty. Even defending basic goals such as a minimum right to work, quality social programmes and social housing, involves head-on confrontation with the current designs of the bourgeoisie.

The working class movement needs a Europe-wide plan for struggle, which responds in a co-ordinated manner to policies which are themselves highly co-ordinated on a Europe-wide level. To the criteria laid down by the employers, workers must spell out their own - beginning with the struggle against unemployment.

35 hours (or less)!

The key component of such a struggle is the massive and co-ordinated reduction of the work week on a European level. An immediate decrease of about 10% of the work week could create an equivalent proportion of jobs. But only if it is accompanied by clauses like those proposed by social movements in all the countries: no loss of salary, no intensification of work, no generalisation of irregular workschedules. This in turn requires

that workers oversee the organisation of the work process and ensure that new workers are indeed hired.

A generalised reduction of the work week is clearly the main answer to the rise in unemployment, for a very simple reason: it is the only rational way to use the gains in productivity and to share them equitably between working people, within and between countries.

It is the best way to counteract the different forms of exclusion and discrimination which are running rampant. It provides for a co-operative solution to the unemployment problem in Europe, in opposition to the neo-liberal approach which essentially amounts to exporting unemployment to neighbouring countries.

This approach in no way contradicts the goal of economic efficiency. If carried out in a co-ordinated fashion on a pan-European level, the effects on the relative competitiveness of EU partners would be neutralised - especially since EU members largely trade amongst themselves.

The idea of co-ordinated, restrictive legislation - a European framework law for a 35-hour work week - could be the starting point for a co-ordinated, generalised reduction to a 30-hour work week. The right of women to work - against the marginalising reduction of the work week represented by mandatory part-time jobs - must be a cornerstone of this struggle. Any campaign must fight the increase in part-time work.

An economic recovery package

The reduction of the work week has to be part of an economic recovery package aimed at fulfilling social needs. Urban renewal, for example, would involve programmes that give a boost to employment. It must be a non-productivist recovery that seeks to meet elementary needs, to improve living conditions, and not to boost private consumption per se nor to build new highways.

Jobs created in the public sector: health and education, for example, should be decentralised, principally to the municipal and local levels. These jobs, however, should not be part of a subsidised second-class sector where workers do not enjoy the same rights and benefits as elsewhere.

Deregulation must be rolled back. The rights of working people should be firmly entrenched in a European system of minimum wage standards, guaranteed income and sectoral collective agreements.

The same harmonisation should be applied to social security - for example, through the creation of a European fund derived from the income of companies, aimed at levelling social programmes upward throughout the EU.

In the same way, public sector services should be harmonised. This applies to the postal system, telecommunications, transport, and so forth - all just as important as a single currency.
Where would the money come from?

All these projects raise the question of financing, although the term isn't really appropriate since we are dealing in part with a reallocation of already existing funds, and catch-up measures aimed at reducing inequalities which successive governments allowed to accumulate over the last decade. While the situation varies from country to country, financing must come from four main sources.

– Funds for unemployment insurance can be reallocated to ensure hiring takes place.

– New wealth would be created as a result of the resulting economic recovery and the jobs added to the public sector.

– Financial earnings and super-profits would be directly taxed. These funds could be returned to companies that hire, and would also serve to put pressure on companies and redistribute resources between sectors and regions.

– A special tax would be levied on the assets of wealthy families in order to mop up quickly public debts accumulated as a result of the drop in taxes on capital gains.

Such a programme is obviously not compatible with the free movement of capital. We cannot let employers decide the future of working people by exerting downward pressure on their working and living conditions. The freedom of capital movement - like all genuine freedoms - must be regulated so that it no longer means the right to impoverish people and to create social insecurity.

This regulation can be achieved by placing a tax on financial transactions. Speculators make their profits by playing on minute differences in interest rates, and so a small tax would be highly dissuasive. Of course, such regulation can only be effective if it is applied and co-ordinated throughout the EU. For this reason, individual countries have to prepare to implement very strict measures of control and retribution.

Then there is the question of the single currency. It should go without saying that such a currency is a tool, created as a means to specific ends. Devaluation or an exit from the European Monetary System are not goals in themselves, but rather steps to be taken if a country feels they are essential for confronting competition on a level playing field. The establishment of a single currency is not an end in itself, but rather the finishing touch to a much broader endeavour.

The persistence of inequality

28 June 1997

However, when one looks closely at the situation of wageworkers and more generally at the status of women in each country, it is clear that the structural effects of part-time work have varied greatly in their impact on the social regulation of women. There is a general trend towards restricting women's right to work, but the tactical angles of attack taken by the different national bourgeoisies have often differed.

Since the beginning of the recent phase of restructuring, and especially since the middle of the 1980s, the position of women in the job market has deteriorated at an accelerating pace. This deterioration flows from the worsening situation of wage workers in general under the twin blows of austerity policies and deregulation. But the attack on woman workers has been greater, because of the general discrimination women still face.

Throughout Europe, a gap of around 30 percent still yawns between men's and women's wages, and the general erosion of buyingpower has been felt particularly by women, who tend to have the worst paying jobs.

At the beginning of the 1990s, women's level of unemployment was higher than men's everywhere except in Britain. In Sweden the difference has been negligible. But in other European countries, women are two or three times as likely to become unemployed as men. The same general picture is true when one looks at the plight of young women. Spain holds the scandalous "record" , with 42,1 percent unemployment among young women.

In general women are unemployed longer than men. Though here there are three exceptions:

- Countries which have low levels of unemployment and a high level of women in the workforce, like Denmark or Sweden.

- Countries which have a very high level of unemployment,and where it is difficult to find another job quickly, like Ireland, or Britain.

- Countries where there is a low official level of unemployment but also a smaller proportion of women active in the workforce, like the former Federal Republic of Germany or the Netherlands.

In these cases, the lower difference between male and female unemployment levels is probably due to women's withdrawal (retreat) from the labour market. Women in these countries become what the OECD (Organisation for Economic Developmentand Development) euphemistically calls "discouraged job-seekers" . Married women with children are not even considered unemployed in some countries. In Ireland, unemployed married women with children receive less than the full unemployment benefit.

Unorganised resistance

None the less, throughout the '80s and '90s, there has been a steady growth in women's participation in the workforce, continuing and in some countries accelerating a trend which began in the 1970s. Despite the crisis, despite unemployment, and despite government pressure, women continue to go out to work. This suggests that even in the absence of a visible struggle around this issue or a specific campaign by tradeunions on woman's right to work, there is still strong, mass, resistance, however unorganised, to any attempt to roll back this hard-won right.

Earnings differentials between women and men persist (and in some countries are widening) despite a series of European directives and legislation. This is in part because these laws are not restrictive enough to affect employers, and partly because effective control mechanisms do not exist. Gaps also persist because men and women only rarely hold the same jobs. Often, we don't even work in the same sectors.

Since the early 1980s, there has been a general structural shift, with jobs being displaced from industry into the tertiary, or service sector. This re-distribution of paid work has had contradictory consequences for women's employment. On the one hand, it has been "positive" in the sense that, because of the sexual segregation of the jobmarket, the level of unemployment among women has risen more slowly than among men. This has been particularly the case in Britain, the European country where the trend towards de-industrialisation and the growth of the service sector has been strongest. In Britain the gap between female and male unemployment is the inverse of the situation in other European countries.

On the other hand, the struggle of women workers at Moulinex in France illustrates quite clearly that women industrial workers have not been spared from the effect on jobs of the relative decline of the sector.

Globalisation has also had vicious effects on working women. Capital's continuing search for lower labour costs in Third World countries only explains a small part of the increase in European unemployment. But these "mobile" jobs are usually concentrated in so-called "traditional" industries, like textiles and electrical appliances. These sectors are labour intensive, rather than depending on sophisticated technologies.

They are often organised along strict "Taylorist" lines. Workers are invariably poorly paid, unskilled, and exposed to wretched working conditions.

In other words, women lose at both ends of globalisation: in Europe they

lose their jobs, and in Asia and Latin America they get jobs, but only under draconian conditions of super-exploitation. What's more, the new jobs created in the "service sector", particularly in sales, have jerry-built a ghetto of underpaid, insecure, part-time "female" jobs. Britain is the extreme case, but France is not far behind, not least in its chain stores and supermarkets.

Part-time work...

In many countries the only area of net growth in job creation in many years has been in part-time jobs.

Although part-time work has been a recognisable phenomenon for more than fifteen years, it has lately begun to spread almost everywhere, including in countries like Greece, where formal part-time contracts were until recently rare. This expansion has been encouraged by government policy initiatives.

There is great disparity across Europe. In southern Europe, Luxemburg and Finland, part-time work represented less than 10 percent of all employment in 1995. At the other end of the spectrum, more than 20 percent of all jobs in Scandinavia, Switzerland, Britain and the Netherlands are part time. France, Belgium, and Germany are in between, with around 15 percent of jobs being part-time.

...a sign of modernity?

Everywhere, however, part-time work is overwhelmingly female. Fully 85% of part time workers in Germany, Belgium and Luxemburg are women, as are 80 percent of part-timer staff in France, Norway, Switzerland, and Britain. One analysis popular in ruling circles presents part-time work as a necessary criteria of "modernity": a statistical classification which allows the neat partitioning of Europe between these northern countries where the levels of women's employment are very high but with a strong tendency towards part-time work, and southern European countries (Spain, Portugal, Greece, Italy) and, to some extent Ireland, where the involvement of women in the workforce is low, often because of their role in the family, and part-time work is poorly developed.

Other "experts" distinguish between an industrially dominated "Rhine" capitalism, defined, as in Germany, by a low level of female participation in the workforce, and an "Anglo-Saxon" capitalism, where the relative de-industrialisation and development of the service sector has as its corollary the opposite: a high level of female participation!

Reading the official reports today, you get the impression that putting numbers on part-time work is practically an implicit extension of the EU convergence criteria!

This type of employment offers bosses and governments a number of short and long term advantages. The relative weight of these benefits may vary depending on the country, and on the concrete forms which part-time work has taken, but what is common about part-time work is that it represents a virtual guarantee that women will never be workers like "everyone else" (men). Women will always have one foot out the door, and one in the kitchen.

In fact, a massive wave of women returning to the home, that eternal dream of the right and the far right, is an impossibility from the strict point of view of a rational capitalist, in the same way that the dream of sending immigrant workers back to "their" country is impossible.What employers need is exactly what these groups today provide: manual labourers made vulnerable by the very conditions (both legal and social) which allow them to work. Workers whose qualifications can be ignored and who can be paid less, precisely because of who they are.

This is what employers get with the administrative harassment of immigrant workers; and this is what they get with the latent indictment of women in the conservative discourse on the family and women's "natural role". A discourse which still resonates for a large number of women, faced with the daily reality of a double workload: on the job, and at home. In this regard, part-time work is plausibly presented as the ideal reconciliation between paid work and family duties.

The same old story

In capitalist Europe, women are still considered only interms of their function within the family. Thus, wherever part-time work takes root, it is inevitably accompanied by measures which bring into question women's economic autonomy. In Belgium, a "partner" (invariably the woman) gets only half the regular unemployment benefit. In France,the allowance for parents (mothers) who choose to stay at home with young children is being extended to the second child, and there is a campaign to create a "parental salary for free choice"; in former East Germany, the right to fulltime employment is being abolished, to conform with the model in Western Germany. The Netherlands is the model: combining of low female participation in the workforce, and a high rate of part-time employment for those who do.

Part-time work must therefore be understood as part and parcel of "family" policies: a method of managing the potential contradictions between taking advantage of women's manual labour and the justification of women's role in the social reproduction of the labour force, in the best interests of capital.

The expansion of part-time work leads to an increasing tendency to "manage the male and female work-forces differently". The "soft" version is clear in northern European countries where there has been a certain socialliberalism, where women have long had access to abortion and where the definition of a family has become more flexible, with acceptance of divorce, of living together, and of children born outside of marriage.

You see the "hard" version further south, where anti-abortion forces are gaining ground, governments are establishing aggressively restrictive family policies and "norms", and the partisans of a public "Moral Order"

refuse to accept the evolution of family types towards the "northern" model. Britain's last Conservative government launched a hypocritical "back to basics" campaign, and continued to scapegoat single mothers. In France, economic policies and social benefits unashamedly favour married couples, and large families.

Maximum flexibility

The struggle against part-time work must also take into account the major role it plays in strategies for deregulating the labour market. Part-time work, which has never been a "social demand" on the part of women, or a better way for them to enter the work world, is something which women endure rather than choose. It meshes well with the general strategies adopted by companies desiring to adapt better to market fluctuations and minimise their labour costs. Part-time work is central to the extension of labour flexibility, and to the employers' dismantling of earlier expectations of a normal, full-time job, with relative security, inherited from the post-war economic boom.

Thus, part-time work is often bound up with other elements of job insecurity: temporary work, subcontracting, and fixed-term contracts; and why it often involves irregular schedules at the discretion of the employer, especially in chain stores and supermarkets.

This is why the majority of part-time jobs are unskilled, with potential neither for training nor promotion; and why part-time status is not only imposed on workers as the only alternative to total unemployment, but often irreversible: a return to full-time work is almost impossible.

This type of part-time work is dominant in France, in Belgium, and especially in Britain, which is in the forefront of labour market shifts. It is in these countries, in fact, that jobs last the shortest amount of time, and that below a certain level, any vestige of equal treatment (prorated pay or bonuses, guarantees) disappear.
While the level of women's employment in Britain is relatively high, the socially approved norm is a two-income household where the man brings home the primary paycheque and the woman works a few hours a week to make up the rest, since she is entirely responsible for childcare in the absence of affordable alternatives.

It should be noted that even if in this case we are talking about a sort of "savage" part-time work, left totally to the discretion of the employer. The Conservative government nonetheless offered financial incentives to the introduction of this type of work.

A new model

Official reports have begun to stigmatise this type of part-time work, judging it discriminatory, and discouraging. The analysis is the following: part-time work should no longer be considered underemployment, or a cut-price job,but should, on the contrary, be regulated and benefit from all of the guarantees of a full- time job. Part-time status should be voluntary, with equal treatment, and access to training and promotion.

This was the gist of the general accords which have just been signed between the European Confederation of TradeUnions, the European Community Industrial Union, and the European Centre for Public Sector Enterprises. These recommendations include eliminating discrimination suffered by part- time workers, and identifying and reducing the obstacles which limit companies ability to increase part-time work.

The long-term goal is that part-time work should be "normalised" , regulated and governed by regulations and guarantees, as it is already in Sweden or in the public sector in France. As a result, it is hoped, part-time work will become acceptable, perhaps even desirable, for a majority of workers.

A false choice

In fact, even under these conditions, the expansion of part-time work for women still rests on a false ideology of "choice". Accepting part-time work as a "choice" means deliberately obscuring the real conditions of working women: the lack of any real male participation in household labour, insufficient or non-existent childcare alternatives, a lack of time, and pathetic jobs, most of which are unskilled and poorly paid.

All of which comes back to the still dominantidea that paid work for women is only subsidiary and temporary, and that women's salary is a complementary"extra" in the family budget.

The extension of part-time work is a way for employers and governments to avoid being forced to shorten the length of the work day for all, which would entail redistributing profits and re-organising social life.

Increased inproductivity and Europe's continued weak economic growth mean that fewer hour of work are necessary. And these hours of paid labour are being distributed among the working population in a harsh and regressive manner, through mass unemployment and the imposition of part-time work.

The central struggle in Europe today is the struggle around defining what work should be: defending the idea that people's desire to work less and live better must not be "settled" at the individual level, by factors like poverty, insecurity and discrimination.

This struggle, which is also a struggle of ideas within the trade union movement, is taking the form of a struggle for the 35 hour, or maybe even 32 hour week, throughout Europe, immediately, and without a loss in pay.

Public services for the common good

28 June 1997, by Maxime Durand

In health care, education, pensions, the post office, telecommunications, transport, water and energy, there is an overriding logic demanding the"re-commodification" of the goods and services involved.

This universal offensive is backed up by international institutions. The latest World Bank report on pensions is essentially a how-to-do-it kit for private pension schemes, to be used in the North, the South and the East.

The specifically European dimension is that privatisation and social spending cuts are being carried out in the name of the Maastricht Treaty. A number of white papers have laid down a programme for privatising the post office, telecommunications and other sectors. Resistance, however, has forced a reluctant recognition of the notion of public service, now referred to as "universal service".

In France, Belgium, and some other countries, the defence of public services is a popular touchstone for the working class movement. But even here the bourgeoisie is waging an aggressive ideological and political offensive. They raise the question of efficiency where public services function poorly - the Italian postal service is a good example. More recently they have raised technological arguments (new products, new demands). In the (nationalised or subsidised) airline industry, they point to competition in a globalised economy.

A two-tiered system

We must stress the dangers of privatisation. By abandoning a system of transfers between regions and sectors, a two-tiered system will be established. Profitable sectors will have priority, while others receive the basic minimum. Any truly European project should do the opposite: expanding such transfers in the interests of social equality and regional balance.

Privatisation increases the quality of services to wealthy and powerful "customers". But if we define quality in terms of the common good, then ensuring direct workers' and users' control over the organisation of public services will probably do more for quality than handing profitable operations over to the market might.

Profit is a short term criteria. The public purse usually picks up the tab for infrastructure investment and research,and, as we know, private companies pay scant attention to the environment. Only by socialising public services can they play a key role in ensuring long-term sustainable development.

Competition leads to the absurd splitting up of "natural" networks and connections. It is wrong to say that the market provides the necessary regulation. If European construction is to be something real, the need is for more and not less regulation in this field.

The bourgeoisie benefits from the low regard the public often has for the state sector - a low regard stemming from bureaucratic structures, social-democrat style nationalisation, technocratic monoliths like the French electricity utility EDF, which has aggressively pushed nuclear power on the country. These state enterprises are hardly models; they do not bring the state closer to the local level, they do not involve consumers, and they are blind to environmental considerations.

A new definition of rights

But rather than defending state enterprises in their current or past form, the working class movement should fashion a renewed vision by advancing demands and new forms of organisation - using a transitional approach and a new definition of citizens rights.

National traditions and consideration of the actual state of affairs in each country should be combined with an over-arching universal vision. The idea is neither to defend an antiquated form of nation-based capitalism nor to build European mammoth bureaucracies. The guiding principle should be democratic subsidiarity.

The whole working class movement must take up these demands.The idea of defending and extending public services must not be left to workers in the concerned sectors, struggling on their own. The struggle must also be European in nature.

Organisationally, trade union organisations and community groups should find a common framework to defend and extend public services. Programmatically, the idea of a Charter of Rights for the Citizens of Europe should take shape around a renewal of the notion of rights - including rights to housing, transport, communication, health care and education.

The automobile society

28 June 1997, by Winfried Wolf

The real EU priority is reducing the cost of road transport. Each year, the average distances travelled by people and merchandise increase. The revised Maastricht Treaty, and European Monetary Union will cause a further, artificial increase of road traffic, increase journey distances, and shift even more traffic from rail to road and air. Like in North America, trains will become more and more rare. There are three main reasons for this.

Car traffic

In 1970, the number of car travellers multiplied by the distance travelled was 1,580 person-kilometres. By 1996, the figure was 2.5 time higher: an incredible 4,000 person-kilometres. And there are less people in each car nowadays. In 1970 the average car contained 2 persons. In 1996 only 1.5.

Rail transport only increased by 30% over the same period, while bus transport increased by 50%. Even in 1970, rail was responsible for only 10% of total transportation. Buses represented 23%, and cars 77%. By 1996 rail only represented6% of total transport, compared with 15% for buses, and 85% for cars.

These figures don't include travel inside urban areas. But given the stagnation in metro and tram construction, the weight of private automobile transport is certainly even higher when we include urban travel.

Trucking

Goods transport (in kilometre-tonnes) has doubled over the last 25 years (from 850 bn. kilometre-tonnes in 1970 to 1,500 bn. in 1996). During this period, the amount of rail transport has slipped by 15%, river and canal transport has stagnated, and pipeline transport has increased by 30%. In contrast, road transport of merchandise has increased by almost 150%, from 420 billion kilometres-tonnes in 1970 to 1,100 bn. in 1996. As a result, the share of trucking in total goods transport increased from 50% in 1970 to 70% in 1996.

Artificial, obligatory traffic

There is very little real economic growth in the EU. In real terms, salaries are stagnant or falling. But we have seen uninterrupted growth of automobile traffic, which the EU even defines as a "growth-stimulating sector." More and more person-kilometres are "produced" every year. The European Commission's new Green Book on transport calculates that "the daily travelling distance of the average European citizen has increased from 16.5 km (10 miles) in 1970 to 31.5km in 1996. This increase in demand has mainly been satisfied by an increase in the use of the private automobile The number of private cars for every 1,000 inhabitants has increased from 232 in 1970 to 435 today."

Over the same period, what the EU calls the "intensity of transport" has increased by more than 50%. In other words, each tonne of merchandise travels 50% further than in 1970, before reaching its buyer.

As in so many other areas of capitalism, in the transport sector we are witnessing the transformation of productive forces into destructive forces. Technology and equipment which once brought mobility for people and diversity in the merchandise available is now engaged in artificial "growth,"and average journey lengths are being stretched.

In goods transport, average journey length is increasing because of an absurd division of labour, and greater distances between producer and customer. The engine of an Opel Corsa automobile is produced in Vienna, Austria, and the body is made in Zaragossa, Spain. EU-inspired subsidies to the cost of commercial transport contribute to this ecological nonsense, destruction of regional economic structures, and miserable working conditions for professional drivers.

Individuals are commuting further and further to work: one consequence of the concentration of capital. The closure of so many small shops has increased the length of the shopping circuit, and the destruction of the urban tissue obliges people to travel further and further for their leisure activities.

There are obvious ecological and economic reasons to put a stop to these developments. And democratic reasons too. In 1995, only 40% of European households had a car. Larger families, families with young children, young people and women are all over-represented in the 60% of households that do not possess an automobile. In other words, policies which favour road transport and the private motorcar are by definition against the interest of a majority of the population.

An increase in the density of car ownership (more cars per 1,000 people) will not mean an improvement in this exclusion. In the United States, increased car ownership has gone hand in hand with the deterioration of the public transport system (bus, tram, metro, rail).

Total automobile society

There are powerful interests opposed to the development of a reasonable, responsible and human transport system. Twelve of Europe's 20 largest trusts are in the oil refining, petrol distribution and vehicle construction business. These companies represent 2/3 of the total turnover of the 20 major trusts on the continent. A rich and influential enemy.

The European Commission and the member states are planning on the assumption that air and road transport of merchandise will double by the year 2010, and that there will be a 30-50% increase in person-kilometres of private automobile transport. Three EU programmes are working actively to create this total automobile society.

EU Structural Funds: These are supposedly an aid to poorer regions. In fact, a large part of spending goes to road building, particularly in "little-

motorised" regions. In 1994 these funds were worth 43.3 billion DM ($29.5 bn). In 1999 they will be 63 bn. DM.

Transnation networks

Most of these high-profile projects concern new "high-use" connections, to "fill the gaps" in the continental transport network. They include the Eurotunnel between Britain and France, a tunnel under the Alps between France and Italy, and the Skanlink bridge between Denmark and Sweden.

There are also a number of destructive High Speed Train projects. Gigantic investments in these rail lines will almost exclusively benefit businessmen. Nine out of ten rail trips in the EU are on trains with an average speed of 50 km/hour or less. For the majority of rail travellers, speeds of 250 km/hour are absurd. The average longer journey is about 200 km. A high speed train could only reduce the time of such a journey by a few minutes.

In June 1996 German Chancellor Helmut Kohl told an EU committee on transport that "a High Speed Train between London and Moscow would substantially increase the support of the citizens for the European Union".

This is grotesque. How many people actually travel between London and Moscow? Almost exclusively businessmen. Who almost exclusively prefer the plane.

Subsidising rail privatisation

At the same time as prioritising long distance, high speed travel, rail operators are dismantling the regional and local transport networks which most people use most. Cuts in staff are reducing the level of service and passenger security. Each application of "market forces" weakens the supposedly weakest section of the travel system: the public system.
In Britain, the "profitability" of bus operators increased after the 1985 liberalisation, even though the number of passengers decreased by 27.4% between 1985 and 1994. Prices increased by 25% during the same period. A clear example of the logic of privatisation: less buses travelling more kilometres, carrying less passengers, who pay more than before. The working conditions of transport staff are also affected. The average age of buses in circulation is increasing, and security norms are being loosened.
Left turn

We need to change the whole direction of transport policy.

- Reducing average journey time.
- Putting strict limits on the destructive potential of the transport system on our environment.
- Stricter speed limits, and a reduction in the maximum tonnage which trucks can carry.
- Lorries should not be allowed to transport merchandise during the night.
- Find ways to cut significantly the amount of merchandise transported across Europe. What is left should be moved by rail.

We need to establish clear estimates of the total real costs of our transport system, including the social and ecological costs. This will inevitably mean increasing the cost of road transport of merchandise. But we should not allow transport companies. to "compensate" for this extra cost by reducing salaries or intensifying the work of their employees. States' increased revenue from these new tariffs should be used to develop public sector transport systems.

Above all, we must stop the privatisation and deregulation of the sector. Mobility should be recognised as a general, social right, like health, education, and the retirement pension. Some say this will inevitably increase bureaucracy.The solution is in the democratisation and decentralisation of this expanded public transport system.

Our International

28 June 1997, by The Editors

So far so good. But in fact the Fourth International has a much broader historical, theoretical and practical foundation.

A direct continuity with the socialist left which existed before the first world war, and the democratic communist left which existed afterwards. If citing our historical references helps clarify who we are, we identify with Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels, Rosa Luxemburg, V I Lenin and Leon Trotsky. The many others who have enriched our analysis and theoretical work include Tchernichevsky, Plekhanov, Hilferding, Otto Bauer, Gramsci, Georg Lukacs, Pannekoek, Alexandra Kollontai, Che Guevara, and our leading comrade Ernest Mandel, who passed away in 1995.

Naturally, one can only build organisations which can fight for socialist revolution by rooting oneself in each national context, and drawing on the best traditions of all the currents of the local workers movement.

It also means participating in, and learning from, the main revolutionary experiences of this century: Castrism, Maoism, Sandinismo, revolutionary populism, liberation theology, and

others.

Open, critical Marxism

The Fourth International is characterised by an open, critical approach to Marxist theory. As a result, we have absorbed and adapted to face the economic, social, political and cultural transformations which, over the last 20 years, have changed the face of the world.

We live in a world based on exploitation and oppression, inequality and social injustice. Less than ever can the "class struggle" be reduced to a simplistic confrontation between Labour and Capital inside the workplace. This is certainly where the working class, the only social force capable of overthrowing capitalism and leading all of society towards emancipation, establishes a balance of forces with capital. But, more than ever, the proletarian movement works in association with other social movements: feminist, ecological, "third-worldist", anti-racist, multi-ethnic, cultural and scientific. Movements for equal rights, against racial, sexual and national discrimination. Movements all of which confront the generalised comodification of life, which devalues things, people, ideas and values.

The Fourth International was born in the 1930s, at the darkest point of the 20th Century. Stalinism had taken power in the Soviet Union and in all the Communist Parties abroad. Fascist or authoritarian regimes were in power in Italy, Portugal, Germany, Spain and France [Hungary? Rumania?]. A militarist, warmongering wave was sweeping through the Socialist Parties. All this was leading towards a terrible world war.

Determined resistance

The Fourth International recognised this situation, and resisted. We made many sacrifices, because we never did a deal with the rulers of the world: the despotic Soviet bureaucracy, or western capitalism, in either its fascist or democratic variants. We held tight to our double motto: democratic "the emancipation of the workers will be the work of the workers themselves," and internationalist, "socialism will be international, or it will not exist."

Today, the Fourth International is present in over 40 countries. Not from nostalgia, but because of militant, political convictions. Wherever there is exploitation and oppression, there is resistance and struggle. These permanent struggles take their full power whenever they carry the perspective of a socialist emancipation of humanity. They will have a chance to succeed if and when the most conscious and energetic militants group themselves in a revolutionary socialist party, which discusses, reflects, acts, and builds roots.

Stalinism has disappeared, and the social democrats have gone over to neo-liberalism. This leaves a large space on the left. To fill this space, and go forward, we need practical co-operation and frank debate between all the anti-capitalist currents, despite their differing historical origins, trajectories, and political cultures. Such co-operation is possible, and urgently necessary. In this non-sectarian, radical spirit of unity, the Fourth International is preparing for the struggles to come. Join us!

The threat of military Europe

28 June 1997

The Eurofighter - cost will be 100 million euros

Most progress is being made in the areas of bilateral co-operation between armies and military industry. On the institutional level, there are still major obstacles to changes which will involve a real transfer of national sovereignty to the supranational level. But behind the scenes, a series of measures have been taken, whose goal is to give the EU a more coherent, operational capacity for intervention. The Amsterdam Intergovernmental Conference is supposed to give its seal of approval to this dangerous development.

European military unification is been haunted by the memory of a traumatic setback in 1954, when the attempt to create a European Defence Community (under NATO auspices) failed spectacularly. The goal was German rearmament, which the US government had favoured since the late 1940s, as part of its strategy of tension and military confrontation with the USSR. But Europe, above all France, was not ready to see Germany rearmed, because of still-painful war wounds, and a desire to hold back Germany's spectacular economic recovery. The only institutional result of that period was the Western European Union (WEU), an empty shell dozing from one parliamentary gathering to the next, without either powers or resources. German rearmament happened anyway.

The same powerful contradictions have determined military co-operation ever since. The military question is part of each member country's foreign policy. And foreign policy is a powerful means for opening markets, securing access to raw materials, protecting foreign direct investments and, more broadly, defending and extending each country's political sphere of influence. Each of the EU's ruling classes would

certainly like the EU to speak "with a single voice", but political rivalries and economic competition within the EU are always enough to brake any major surrender of national sovereignty.

This explains the cacophony of EU military policy during the Gulf War, the conflicts in ex-Yugoslavia, the Rwanda crisis, and elsewhere. Disunity, and the interests of national states has dominated, rather than some community spirit. These stronger national interests include the privileged ties between German Chancellor Helmut Kohl and former Soviet and Russian leader Mikhail Gorbachev, German ties with Croatia, French ties with Serbia, British ties with Bosnia (in tight alliance with the US), France's repeated solo operations: in the Middle East, nuclear testing in the Pacific; covert clashes in Africa between the US-British tandem and France-Belgium, and so on.

Nuclear weapons make all this even more complicated. Not only are they the quintessence of "global diplomacy", they are the supreme weapon, symbolising ultimate power over the planet, and requiring a single centre to take the extreme decision to drop the bomb.

Different histories

The EU's "big three" are differently situated in the world arena, largely because of their specific historical trajectories.

- France was a great neo-colonial power, but is now reduced to a second-rank capitalist country. It tries to make up for its weakness through a great measure of autonomy in foreign and military policy (with its own atom bomb, its overall military strength, and the quality and versatility of its army).

- Britain, no longer the world's greatest imperialist power, has linked its future to a "special relationship" with the US. While maintaining its own nuclear arms, it tries to keep its status as a power by following in the wake of the US, which it sees as the only force capable of guaranteeing global stability.

- Germany, defeated in World War Two, is now the EU's biggest economic power, and the third biggest economy in the world. But, for obvious historical reasons, Germany cannot express its economic strength on the political and military level. It still needs the US and EU to camouflage its diplomatic and military advances.

The new world situation is increasingly unstable. This, combined with the EU's progress, have given new life to discussions of "Europe's defence". This immediately poses the fundamental choice: either western Europe stays under the NATO umbrella, which assures US hegemony, or else the old continent acquires a substantial measure of operational,technological and financial autonomy through an independent structure, giving "muscles" to the WEU and making it the EU's armed wing.

The Eurocorps

Three developments on the purely military level have opened up new options. First is the voluntarist Franco-German effort, sealed by the creation of a joint military unit (the 50,000 man "Eurocorps") and of a "Common Defence Council" that brings the two countries' general staffs and experts together for regular, frequent meetings.

The lesson of the 1991 Gulf War has played a role: In that conflict the US imperial power reduced some countries (including France and Britain) to an auxiliary role, and relegated others (Germany and Japan to the role of financial support. France accepted; Paris has since been retreating in the face of insidious attacks by its US competitor in its own African backyard (where an "Anglophone" north-south corridor now spans the continent).

Meanwhile, Germany has shaken off the restrictions on its army, imposed by the Allies and written into its constitution. The German army can now operate outside the country's borders. Hesitation and resistance from the German reformist left (Social Democrats and Greens) proved no match for humanitarian demagogy, underpinned by the EU's impotence in ex-Yugoslavia, and political thrusts by US imperialism in Europe and the Mediterranean. However discrete, Germany's new military role is a highly significant turning point.

The military meets the market

Thirdly, globalisation has hit the military-industrial sector full-force, in Europe as well as the US. This has accelerated military-industrial co-operation and integration in the EU. This sector depends overwhelmingly on state intervention. No aspect, from research and development to marketing, escapes state command. Restructuring has been imposed due to drastic cutbacks in production (and employment) and budgetary restrictions (thanks to Maastricht).

The most advanced sectors, particularly those oriented towards aerospace, have come through relatively unscathed. But the classical arms industry is going through a major crisis. This explains the appeal, under cover of bi- or multilateral intergovernmental co-operation, of bi- or multilateral joint ventures for the production of new weapons systems. In fact, programmes set in motion by the main European "cannon merchants" - Britain, France, Germany and Italy - are no longer to be counted on. We are seeing in this sector the silhouette of an emerging, authentic "European capital".

The real turning point was the Franco-German agreement signed in Nuremberg in November 1996. Prolonged, ad hoc co-operation gave way to the detailed definition of a genuine joint defence policy. This has consequences for both Franco-German relations and the EU. It is based on a double upheaval. France has accepted the end of a myth: the operational effectiveness of its independent nuclear arsenal. It has abandoned the equally illusory and ruinous perspective of an independent European defence founded on the French and British nuclear arsenals. Suddenly, France is re-joining the

NATO military command.

France and Germany are joining Britain (which never had any doubts on this score) in placing their nuclear weapons, as a "complementary" force, under the US umbrella. Germany has broken the taboo and is giving itself the means to operate outside its borders, particularly in order to contribute to "stability in the Mediterranean basin". France and Germany "commit themselves to participating [together], in very varied forms, in crisis-management missions".

A European pillar in NATO

The perspective of transforming the WEU into the EU's independent armed wing has been given up for good, to be replaced with a "European pillar" within NATO. The reasons for this are strictly military, technological and financial. The complex organisational chart (the chain of command, division of geopolitical zones and material resources, operational leadership, etc.) that results from it will have to pass the practical test of reliability and effectiveness.

For the key EU countries, the way has thus been opened to move forwards together towards a growing complementarity in the fields of "means of command, intelligence, logistics, long-range transport, as well as education and training of personnel".

This military rapprochement is based on a mixture of supra-nationality and intergovernmentalism. The practical consequence will clearly be a military reinforcement of the EU, if ever the member states' political intentions should coincide. This substantial rapprochement on the military level requires a reinforcement of the "common foreign and security policy", which should be decided by "qualified majorities" rather than by unanimity, as presently. This is the counterpart of the "common police and judicial space", which goes together with military unification.

This advancing Euromilitarisation is a real danger. The danger is all the greater because fear of war and instability (in the EU's eastern and southern periphery), Europeanist ideology (against the US's new offensive spirit) and humanitarian hypocrisy towards the Third World have destroyed the peace movement of the 1980s, devastated the organisations and NGOs that were its backbone, and broken the opposition of the (political and intellectual) reformist left among the social democrats and Greens.

Demands

For all these reasons, we must begin a project of activist re-mobilisation and political rearmament, which must combine "old" slogans that have unfortunately lost none of their validity with new proposals:

- Against NATO, particularly against its European pillar.

- Dissolve the Eurocorps, not in the name of national defence but in the name of anti-militarism.

- US 7th Fleet out of the Mediterranean.

- Reorientation of military research towards civilian, social goals.

- Drastic cuts in the military budget so as to meet social needs.

- Total, immediate and unconditional nuclear disarmament.

- Openness and public control over the whole weapons industry and more broadly over all military industry (orders, production, trade), so as to move towards peace conversion.

- Systematic demystification of military intervention under cover of humanitarian aid.

- Towards universal disarmament.

Europe's ecological challenge

28 June 1997

The degradation of the environment has disastrous consequences on public health, and deepens social inequality. Meanwhile, the economic powers which are responsible escape effective control by the citizenry. Under the neo-liberal stick, ecological, social and democratic issues have never seemed so closely linked.

Remember the Rio summit? That great media-feast five years ago, with its solemn promises and lyrical monologues? The governments of the EU were all keen to come to the podium and say their piece. Confronted with the undiplomatic brutality of the USA, they hinted, Europe's natural destiny was to promote durable development, and protective relationships towards the third world countries. On 1 March this year, the "Rio+5" conference approved the Earth Charter, but in a climate of general indifference among rulers, and unaware to the ruled.

Shrinking biodiversity

Europe's biodiversity is shrinking fast. The continent is rich and powerful, but the "practical means" to stop the decline are supposedly lacking. A recent study by Birdlife International (Conservation Series 3) reported that 40% of bird species are in an "unfavourable situation." In the last 20 years, one in four of the continent's 514 bird species has suffered a "substantial reduction" in numbers. And yet these are the years in which most conservation efforts have been

made. European legislation has been reinforced, the number of nature reserves and national parks has grown considerably, and a number of species have been reintroduced after disappearing locally.

Some success has been made, which shows that human action can make a difference. But overall, the measures taken have clearly been insufficient. Not just for birds, but for the other animals, and for plant life. Birdlife International concludes that we must "fundamentally re-evaluate agricultural and land use policies." The basic problem is that "our overall conception of economic development (in agriculture, in territorial development, land re-conversion and the drying out of waterlogged regions) is responsible for the decline in bio-diversity in Europe. To solve this problem we must go beyond the creation of protected zones and the local re-introduction of extinct species. Biodiversity protection policies must be integrated into allspheres of economic activity."

The EU's "monolithic" Common Agricultural Policy is the largest single factor behind the decline in biodiversity, according to the report. The loss of biodiversity is not recorded as a cost in the CAP system. But all intensely managed environments, including urban regions, are also affected. The disappearance of the countryside, the extinction of species of plants and animals, the standardisation and artificialisaion of the framework of our lives, all this reduces the fields within which we can be active. In other words, the loss of biodiversity leads to the impoverishment of our civilisation.

Natural heritage is also a scientific heritage. It contains a treasure of knowledge and discoveries, in medicine and industry. It is also a living resource which is essential for the preservation of our basic living conditions in the long term. It is essential to maintain its diversity. Each new catastrophic flood, caused by past human interventions, reminds us of the cost of neglect. So does the qualitative aggravation of urban and rural pollution, with its social consequences in terms of sickness, declining access to drinking water, and so on. The evolution of the climate is frankly alarming.

The effects are already visible

The consequences of the decline in the environment have been felt in the developed countries as well as the third world in recent years. Take health. Recent studies suggest that hundreds of people die every year in the major cities of Europe as a result of atmospheric pollution caused by excessive automobile traffic. Many more people suffer chronic asthma, again as a result of car exhaust emissions. The high incidence of leukaemia among young people living near the nuclear waste recycling and storage centre near the Hague, Holland, needs no commentary.

Babies and very young children who are exposed to industrial pollution will bear the marks all through their lives. Medically and socially.

Water resources are running dangerously low, and the quality of remaining sources is declining. As a result, the price of water is rising rapidly, to the point where a growing number of families are being disconnected from the municipal water supply, because they are unable to pay their bills. Some of the poorest people in Europe have to drink mineral water, because the taps in their apartments are dry!

In these conditions, why is ecological sense still not centre-stage? As far as biodiversity is concerned, ecological demands in Europe, as elsewhere, confront the underlying logic of a market system dominated by large, powerful private interests.

Capital versus the environment

Ecological consciousness, vigilance and activity vary considerably between the EU member states. Overall, however, people have an instrumentalist conception of nature. Sometimes, the state imposes limits on democracy, particularly where the country has nuclear weapons, and nuclear fuel.

A technocratic corps has direct access to the top spheres of the administration, and has established organic links with public and private sector industrialists. A series of key economic sectors work in a directly anti-ecological way: chemicals, agro-foodstuffs, automobile, civil and military nuclear, construction, public works, leisure, market management of natural resources, and the powerful and reactionary hunters' associations.

Each of these lobbies intervenes actively in politics, mobilising enormous financial resources to squash any signs of ecological opposition, and block democratic choice. When he came to power in 1981, President Mitterand promised French voters a "great debate" on the country's energy policies. It never happened. And for years, the country's nuclear bureaucracy has carried out a mass brainwashing campaign, based on paid television advertising, and aiming to wipe out all memories of the Chernobyl disaster, and the failure of the Superphenix generator, destined to become the jewel of the French nuclear industry. So much for the right of citizens to decide on their own future.

Governments rarely hesitate before breaking their own laws on the environment, where the interests of these powerful lobbies demand it. They have even less hesitation where European regulations are concerned.

In any case, the control of vital resources like water increasingly escapes any form of public control, at the local or national level. States have proved incapable of preventing the major agro-businesses from drawing excessive amounts of water from underground reserves, and increasing soil and water pollution. Where water is still under public control, its management is increasingly delegated to large private companies.

These same companies are expanding into the banking sector, and the communications industry. They are involved in huge international manoeuvres, where the search for profit and the search for power are

closely linked. Any notion of public service is foreign to them. And yet, they are responsible for water, a public good. This privatisation of a vital resource has already had considerable ecological and social consequences: decline of the environment, large increases in the price of drinking water, and a loss of control of local authorities over their immediate environment.

Ecological demands confront the blind logic of the market, in which only "effective" (cash-backed) demand is important, which ignores the most pressing human needs unless they can be expressed as buying power, and which is completely uninterested in the 'price-less' equilibrium between human society and biosphere. But ecological demands also confront specific capitalists, often the most powerful. Private interests which systematically intervene to prevent the implementation of public policies which threaten to reduce their profits and power.

In other words, political ecology is not something which intervenes on the edge of capitalism, or in an undetermined zone of consensus and reasonable compromise. Ecological demands touch the very heart of the system. This is why they encounter such deep resistance. And why they can and should be integrated into our project for an global alternative society.

Projects for an alternative society

A sector of the peasantry, which has resisted the destructive transformation of the rural world since the 1960s, today not only struggles for the protection of small producers against the major agro-industrial groups, but challenges the dominant notions of "progress" and "modernisation". Without falling into nostalgia, radical peasant groups have recently popularised a renovated concept of "peasant agriculture," at the same time as the larger rural unions, particularly those controlled by the big cereal producers, have completely accepted the dominant model of agro-industrial development.

In the countryside, there are two clearly opposed projects for the society of the future.

The development of the agro-foodstuffs industry implies the standardisation of the countryside, and increasingly artificial methods of production. The creation of giant production units, and the exponential increase of chemical intervention in farming. The continued exhaustion of vital resources. All of which combines to reduce Europe's biodiversity, increase pollution, reduce the quality of foodstuffs, create new risks and new epidemics, and reduce the living conditions of the poorest.

It also implies the continuation of the massive rural exodus which feeds mass unemployment in urban areas. Entire regionsof the European countryside are becoming a human desert. The socio-economic tissue of these regions is being torn apart, and public services are disappearing.

The necessity to export at all costs means making the people of the third world dependent on "our" food exports. This truly imperialist dependency is one of the most serious problems facing several third world countries. Vital markets are coming under the domination of the agribusiness barons. The law of profit is increasing its kingdom. Subsistence agriculture, political independence and original patterns of agricultural production are being overturned. A real cultural manipulation .

Progressive peasants' movements have the responses to these problems. The answer combines ecological questions (like diversity), social issues (like health and employment), democratic demands (limiting the control of agro-business over rural areas) and internationalism (recognising the right of the peoples of the south to food self-sufficiency and cultural authenticity).

This critique of the basis of the dominant model of development is applicable not just to the EU's agricultural policies, but to its overall conception of "growth," as something dominated and guaranteed by the largest conglomerates. Former European Commission President Jacques Delors was obsessed with a huge plan of public works of doubtful social utility, and prohibitive ecological costs, but representing considerable profits for key interests, if only the EU could find the finances.

Unifying the struggles

Ecological demands have often been considered a "luxury," or at least a secondary priority, given the urgent social crisis. And yet, in the north and the south, we can already feel the implications of the ecological crisis, touching a growing range of aspects of our conditions of life.

Ecological issues are issues for today, not just the future. That was true yesterday, it is even more true today. The neo-liberal offensive contained within the Maastricht Treaty, and, at the global level, within the framework set by the International Monetary Fund and the World Trade Organisation, is an offensive in all areas of life. Logically, we should adapt the conditions of struggle in all areas.

This neo-liberal offensive facilitates the convergence of social, democratic and ecological struggles, which increasingly confront a universal, anti-human logic. "Ecological questions" are everywhere emerging, disguised as questions of public health, new social inequalities, and Europe's growing "democratic deficit." Consciousness is evolving! What Chernobyl did for the nuclear question, "mad cow disease" is doing for agro-productivism..

The project of an alternative society is slowly being re-born, though the road ahead is still long. This is a tremendous opportunity, providing that the ecological reference-point does not disappear, with environmental issues being presented as social and democratic issues. Because it is precisely the ecological reference which forces us to systematically rethink the evolving relationship between human societies and nature. A process of reflection which is far from complete, and from which revolutionary socialist currents

must not be absent.

The EU's eastward expansion

28 June 1997, by Catherine Samary

As if they weren't Europeans all along. As if the only experience worthy of being called "European" was the West's. As if Maastricht Europe was democratic and "civilised". And as if Maastricht Europe was ready to open its borders in order to share the blessings of unification with the poorer, more agricultural Central and Eastern European countries (CEEC) and the Baltic states. [1]

The collapse of Comecon and the USSR accelerated a radical reorientation of CEEC trade towards the European Union, which Germany was the first to profit from. This was the result of political choices made by the new ruling groups. Central and Eastern Europe's rulers (however much the composition of its governments has shifted back and forth lately) have all portrayed joining the EU as the only possible way forward. Their peoples, whom they never dream of genuinely consulting - about joining the EU any more than about the economic "transition" - express many reservations and worries when they are polled.

As in Western Europe, all the "structural adjustments" already associated with the "transition" are justified more and more often by the need to meet EU "norms". But since the EU exists, and there is no coherent alternative to it, it is the only pole of attraction for these countries, which are economic and ideological orphans. People associate the EU with the hope of economic development - or rather, they are afraid that not joining the EU would mean increasing marginalisation.

The "Visegrad group" (Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Slovenia) constitutes a free-trade zone between those countries that are "furthest along" in the transition.They distinguish themselves in particular from Bulgaria and Romania (both of which have just acquired new governments that threaten to speed up shock therapy).

Expansion is planned

The Copenhagen European Council meeting in June 1993 decided in principle to admit all the Central and Eastern European countries and Baltic states to the EU. The Council meeting in Essen in December 1994 mandated the European Commission to produce a White Paper laying out the tasks that these countries must carry out in order to harmonise their laws and institutions with the Union's. There is no doubt that Central and Eastern Europe have put their shoulders to the wheel. Between now and the end of 1997 the Commission should prepare reports on the various problems blocking East European membership. France's Balladur government has added to these procedures a "Stability Pact", which is supposed to make these countries settle the differences among them by treaty (particularly differences over minority rights and borders) as a precondition for joining.

In practice, Association Agreements have been the only moves to modify the EU's relationship with Central and Eastern Europe (except for the Phare programmes, which are supposed to help restructuring). The Association Agreements move towards establishing a free-trade zone with these countries, from which - judging by Central and Eastern Europe's growing trade deficits - the EU (and within the EU mainly Germany) reaps most of the benefits. We are entitled to ask, in spite of all the hypocritical speeches about openness, whether this is, in reality, the EU governments' preferred substitute to actually letting Eastern Europe in.

For some countries, including Britain, the broadest possible opening to the East would be a way to reduce the European Union itself to a free-trade zone. Other governments argue that the need for "cohesion" of the "hard core" justifies keeping the Mediterranean countries, let alone Central and Eastern Europe, outside the Economic and Monetary Union.

But at what price?

Measurements of the costs of enlargement, based on the assumption that existing criteria for the Structural Funds (for aid to the Union's less developed regions) and for the Common Agricultural Policy would be applied to the Visegrad group, estimate that the Union's budget would have to double. If the whole of Central and Eastern Europe were let in, the budget would quadruple. Though this would still be only 0.4% of the existing EU's GDP, i.e. much less than the Marshall Plan after World War Two. In any case these "calculations" are more than conjectural. Depending on different hypotheses about dates, the number of countries involved, the unemployment rate, the growth rate, prices, etc., the results can vary by a ratio of 1 to 8.

Such calculations are be and will continue to be used to argue for three kinds of proposals, which we must reject:

Option 1) Postpone the idea of integrating Central and Eastern Europe into the EU until the region is less poor - and meanwhile impose adjustment policies that will make them poorer.

Option 2) Change the Structural Funds rules so that fewer countries benefit from them - this is a way to play Southern Europe off against Eastern Europe.

Option 3) Get rid of any development funds and agricultural policy,

according to the logic of creating the least (European) state possible and giving free rein to the market.

In reality the issues involved in eastwards enlargement are the same as those that we raise in general about the EMU and Maastricht criteria:

- European choices must be made openly and democratically. So we must open up pluralist debates about alternative European choices and policies to the peoples involved, including those in the South and East.

- We must support an approach of democratic consultation of the peoples of Eastern Europe, which means full information for them and referendums.

- While we must make known our criticisms of the EU and the social movements that oppose the EU as it now functions, we must equally avoid vetoing any application to join. If this EU is not capable of including peoples who want to join, then we have to change the Union and the way it functions.

- We oppose both the logic of a market without borders and the logic of "Fortress Europe", a hard core functioning on the basis of monetarist convergence criteria. This is just as true for the East as the South.

- Yes to European structural funds for the reduction of real development lags, for building infrastructure, for education, research and job creation.

- Yes to a redefinition of an agricultural policy that stops encouraging a productivism that devastates the environment, human health, and the least developed regions of Europe and the world.

- Yes to funds that ensure balanced regional development and support the creation and diversification of rural employment.

- Yes to development aid to Eastern Europe, which would ensure people's "security" much more than the billions that will be spent to incorporate them into NATO.

Footnotes

[1] The ten countries that are candidates for EU membership are the Central and Eastern European countries (CEEC) - Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Slovenia (all counted as Central European), Romania and Bulgaria (both counted as Balkan) - and the Baltic states: Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia. As a group they have a total agricultural acreage amounting to about 44% of the existing 15 EU countries, and an agricultural work force amounting to nearly 27% of their total work force (as opposed to 5.7% in the EU today, or almost 20% in Greece). Out of the ten, the country with the highest per capita GDP is Slovenia (nearly $9000), which is barely half the EU's average per capita GDPtoday (though close to that of the EU's least developed regions).

The socialist alternative

28 June 1997

This disaster is not anonymous. It has faces and names. The list of top multinationals is public knowledge. The names and addresses of top directors and top shareholders are in the records. Their responsibility is clear. So is the responsibility of the politicians who, oh so democratically, manage their interests for them. The European Union (EU) is part of this system. It's modest ambition is to add a few "humanist" trappings.

The "new world order" born from the collapse of "communism" and the Gulf War promised peace, democracy and universal prosperity. The illusion only lasted a few years. But what a period! 1990-95 was a brief but decisive moment in the 20th Century. Not "midnight" in the century, but a terrible silence. Big capital's ideas machine seriously tried to convince us that we had reached "the end of history." To wipe clean the memory of the workers movement. To destroy our historical references. To uproot the very idea of an alternative society.

The zealot hack ideologists of the capitalist system sincerely believed in the New World Order and the end of history. The confusion was much more widespread. And the fog is only slowly lifting. After the disaster in Eastern Europe, many people now doubt the "feasibility" of socialism. Many still identify socialism with the Stalinist system.

Deep demoralisation

The demoralisation even affects those who never fell for the old mystification. The popularity of socialist ideas has shrunk massively, after 150 years in which socialism, precisely, gave hope and perspective to everyday struggles. That isn't the case any more. Particularly among younger people, for whom ecology, peace, aid to the third world and the marginalised of our own rich societies provide the contours of a better society, and it is the anti-racist and anti-fascist struggle which is the principle source of radical militancy.

This decline in the popularity of socialism is also due to the deep loss of credibility of the labour movement. The Mitterand years in France symbolise the incapacity of elected social democrats to respond to the aspirations of workers and young people. "Easy money" did the rest. The traditional leaderships are increasingly perceived as part of the "system" we must struggle against. They are part of the problem, rather than part of the solution. The working class doesn't, at the moment, appear

to people as the generous, rising force which will deliver society from all forms of oppression and exploitation. Instead, the proletariat is rocked by transformations in the labour process. And the labour movement is on the defensive: struggling obstinately for its immediate interests, without any alternative project for society.

Revolt is vital

Workers and all the oppressed will always resist and revolt. This is a vital need, not a question of ideological motivation. This class struggle, in the widest sense, has never halted. Today there are more, rather than less reasons to struggle against the status quo. If wage-earners, women and young people are to re-appropriate the socialist project, they will do so through new major struggles, new experiences which will shape the radical movement to come, and new kinds of organising.

This new socialism will be a combination of the fundamental aspirations of the world of work, and modern aspirations like the desire for rewarding and useful work, control over our free time, ecology, continuing education, responsible citizenship in a multi-ethnic and multi-cultural society, a new relationship between men and women, equality, justice, and a radical, active, democracy, close to the concerns of the citizen...

The new radicals

This will be mainly the struggle of a new generation, which will carry the socialist project forward with all the energy and audacity that characterises youth. Like each previous generation, they will adopt their own symbols, slogans, songs, ways of working together, and organisational structures. It will take some time to re-knit the bonds of solidarity, revitalise organisations, collectively re-imagine the world to come, and set off on the revolutionary offensive.

The future has already begun, in the current struggle to impose new social priorities. In the end, this can only be done if society itself takes control of the major levers and instruments of the economy. This means seizing them from a private sector which has totally failed to do what we need and desire. These powerful interests will resist, and Big Capital will have to be expropriated, whether we call it "nationalisation," "socialisation," or "putting into public service."

This is not an end in itself, but an indispensable means of ensuring true efficiency. A means of proceeding to the complete renovation of the state, in the direction of active, daily democracy, in the workplace and in the places where people live. For the first time in history, people’s votes will have immediate practical effects. A system in which all social relationships can evolve towards more equality, more conviviality, more humanity, and more happiness for everyone.