

PREFACE

This year's volume opens with an assessment of the European Union from the point of view of left strategy by Gregor Gysi, who was elected president of the Party of the European Left at its Congress in December. An idea of the few options left to a country led by a radical left party, which still suffers under the EU's financial regime, is given by Greece's Minister of Finance, Euclid Tsakalotos.

With the ongoing developments of neoliberalism – financialisation, externalisation of labour, workers as entrepreneurs of their own labour power, etc. – it becomes ever harder to apprehend human relations and how people produce their world. A de-mystifying, deciphering effort is needed, one that locates the changes within a natural history of human beings producing themselves and society, which at present still occurs within a capital-based mode of life. But at the same time the new must be analytically embraced, in fact understood as a development of the old. This is what Ursula Huws does in her essay on the problems of labour in the digital age. By contrast, an empiricist theorising of the conjuncture, that is, one that does not see the new within this larger context, has led to a supposition – in variants deriving from André Gorz – that there is an emergent, naturally occurring and emancipatory post-labour regime based on creative intellectual work via internet technologies, or that we are entering a period of misery due to a diminution of employment and vast precarisation of labour, a dystopic kind of post-labour society. Both views lead to a politics in which labour-movement-based organising, however reconceived, is seen as beside the point.

This – along with the related defeats, failures or shortcomings of the social democratic, communist, and new radical lefts – has created the basis for a new populism that has spread within part of the left and for the partial tendency to regard the left-right distinction as irrelevant. Chantal Mouffe has proposed replacing it with the conflict between the people and the elites or 'us' and 'them'. An example cited by Roger Martelli is Spain's Podemos, of which an important current poses the social antagonism as that between

the 'people' and the 'caste' instead of between specified constellations of social classes. Alberto Garzón fleshes out the complex and contradictory outlook(s) both of this new party and of Izquierda Unida.

In the most recognisable and unrespectable form of populism, the nationalist radical right proposes a conflict between an ethnic entity (or, in its more modernised form, the citizens who have been born in the country in question) versus parasitic financial, and cultural, elites. Its image of 'the people' is in certain cases a hazy mixture of common-man 'workerism' and a nativism that also embraces the indigenous business class. A European specificity is that, due to the distorting effects of the EU's technical economic governance structures, the goal is posed of wresting back national sovereignty from foreign bureaucratic domination.

By contrast, the diffuse populism current in some sectors of the left certainly does not pose the popular pole as an ethnic entity or as the natives but variously as the poor, the 99 per cent, the little people, the collection of the excluded, the immigrants, etc. who confront the rich, the privileged.

As Walter Baier urges in the context of the election of Donald Trump in the US, the left, in resisting nationalist right-wing radicalism, should acknowledge the validity of the social complaints of the radical right's working-class voters – in some important instances by now no longer a minority of these parties' electorate. They feel threatened by the neoliberal national and EU policies of most centre-left parties of government but also are not attracted by the politically-correct image they get from parts of the left which content themselves with a socially insensitive sort of political liberalism or substitute a class-wide approach with an NGO type of charity advocacy for particularly disadvantaged social layers. The radical right indeed poses a threat to liberal democracy. However, moral condemnation is not sufficient; an ardent political struggle is required to halt their rise. That right-wing radical voters primarily consist of lower middle class people afraid of losing their status – and that the non-voters largely come from those parts of the working class that already feel disenfranchised but are not a permanent 'party' of non-voters and can come back to the polls when offered something meaningful – is a point driven home by Baier and developed systematically by Horst Kahrs, Bernhard Müller, and Gavin Rae in terms of Germany and Poland. Kahrs points out the vicious circle (and then offers strategies to get around it): When social property in the form of welfare-state legal entitlements is whittled away working class people no longer feel like equal citizens and they vote less. If the left wants to strengthen redistribution the votes are likely not to be there for this, for upward redistribution has already decreased voter participation.

In response to the trend of regarding the left-right distinction as outdated, Roger Martelli suggests that one problem lies with seeing ‘left’ and ‘right’ as automatic identities of social groups. It is then possible to conclude that left and right are no longer relevant when a group of workers no longer identifies as left. Instead of this, Martelli suggests viewing capitalist society as repeatedly reproducing left and right poles of attraction rather than fixed positions. Viewed through this prism, the left-right polarity continues to be as real as ever. And, moreover, successful examples of left political culture have historically been built around specific projects for society, concrete visions, not simply on the representation of a group. There is no point, Martelli says, in pulling together the ‘people’, if not around a specific project for society, and if the project is to overcome the inequality generated by capitalism it is not the totality of the people that can be gathered around it, but only a majority constellation built around the working classes.

Serge Wolikow provides a historical genealogy of the left, and the conditions that generate the differentiations between ‘radical’ and ‘government’ left, with an emphasis on the centrally important French experience. And Jukka Pietiläinen shows how varied the issues are that ground left identification in different European countries; nevertheless, the basic group of issues and concerns constituting the poles of attraction delineated by Martelli are discernible.

The alternative to ‘left populism’ is certainly not a return to a narrow workerist conception based on the surface characteristics of factory-organised wage workers of the Fordist and pre-Fordist epochs. Lutz Brangsch argues that – despite the privatisation and fragmentation of public space and emphasis on the internet as a commercialised surrogate for it, allowing people to express themselves non-committally – the idea of a self-organised left political party is as relevant as ever, for never before have wage workers been so skilled and, due to the consolidation of the social division labour as a complex process, so objectively capable of gaining control over society. Similarly, Alexander Buzgalin, in taking us through the devastating fragmentations wrought by neoliberalism, in part from a post-Soviet angle, sees potential in the consciousness of the new kind of digital creative worker, allied to the workers in material production, for the building of a new kind of left consciousness and organisation. And Ludmilla Bulavka uses the perspective of the ‘active subjectivism’ of the Soviet ‘new man’ of the 1920s to critique post-modernism and posit a political subject who can de-mystify reality and change it. In so doing she materially grounds the appropriation and creation of culture as a necessity.

Although Baier, Gregor Gysi, and Pedro Chaves – who documents the

intensification of the EU's post-democratic technical, economic governance – all feel that there is need of rupture and a radical refounding of the European Union, they argue that the EU is too easy a target. If the EU falls apart it will not be replaced by an order that is less capitalist or more peaceful. Moreover, both the national constitutions and the EU treaties will only allow social change if there are massive social struggles, which must occur on all levels. In his interview, Tsakalotos deals with the problem of maintaining the identity and substance of a radical left party when it is in government and has to make painful compromises with austerity, indicating how it may nevertheless be possible to limit privatisation. Against Lexit he argues that since it is only the left that can offer a programme to reduce inequalities while also confronting the cross-border issues of climate change and tax evasion a retreat to the national sphere does not make sense.

Geoff Eley's historical essay on democracy tries to deal with the dynamics of its actual emergence. Democracy results far more from popular militancy than from importing the proper civil-society institutions, as post-communist ideology in Eastern Europe would have it. A historical approach is key here because in reality democratic capacities are expanded in ways that go far beyond juridical ones.

Susan Zimmermann deals with the complex dialectics and ironies of women's emancipation and anti-homophobia as precious assets of the West in legitimating its imperial intervention and control. She also points out how, historically, Western discourse and policies demonising misogynist practices of non-Western colonised societies have contributed to reifying and culturalising these practices and co-creating their religious dimension in reality.

Michael Löwy clarifies an important part of ecosocialism's prehistory, pointing to William Morris and Walter Benjamin as predecessors, and sheds light on the ecosocialism of Hugo Blanco and related indigenous movements in Latin America. The Roundtable on climate change and left strategy provides much information and analysis of attempts to link social and ecological justice, indicating experiences that have developed the populations' capacities to engage with emancipatory ecological change.

Joachim Bischoff provides a rich survey of the development of secular stagnation, the role of China in the question of world economic growth, and concrete 'New Deal' alternatives that could be advocated now.

In the Country Reports, Yann Le Lann deconstructs media clichés about the social composition of the Nuit Debout participants. Richard Seymour explains how the weakness of the left, of the Labour Party, and of the Labour left ironically made Corbyn's victory possible while pointing out its

fragility. Pablo Sánchez provides a balance sheet of Barcelona's Barcelona en comú government. And Anej Korsika points to the origins of the current situation in the Balkans in the left and right movements during World War II and the liberalising currents of the 1970s, which paralleled the advent of neoliberalism in the West.

The volume closes with a collective report on activities and events organised by the transform! europe network in 2016.

The transform! europe network was established in 2001 during the World Social Forum in Porto Alegre by a small group of intellectuals from six different European countries, representing left research institutions or journals, who wanted to coordinate their research and educational work. Today transform! consists of 29 member organisations and observers from 21 countries.

The network is coordinated by a board of eight members, and its office is located in Vienna. transform! maintains a multilingual website and publishes a continuously growing number of reports, analyses, and discussion papers on issues related to the process of European integration.

Just like the biannual journal which transform! published from 2007 to 2013, the yearbook is simultaneously published in several languages; it now appears in English, French, German, Greek, and Italian. Expanding our audience and broadening the horizon of the experiences reflected in *transform!* are not the only reasons why we publish our yearbook in several languages. We do not see translation as a mere linguistic challenge but consider it a way to bridge political cultures that find their expression in different languages and in the varied use of seemingly identical political concepts. This kind of political translation is of particular importance when set against the current historical backdrop of the left in Europe, and it focuses on finding unity in diversity by combining different experiences, traditions, and cultures. It is at the heart of transform! europe's work.

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