

“European Integration: Impasses and Alternatives”

By Angelina Giannopoulou

Dear comrades, dear friends, I'm happy to be here mainly because this is an opportunity for all of us to discuss all these kind of things that challenge us every day. I wasn't sure where my contribution should focus in, since the “European integration and the left strategy” is a very broad topic with many open questions. But, if we want to be honest, we have to admit that the SU of the EL and transform is an event primarily for us, for comrades and friends. We know that no hundreds of people outside our parties and our foundations will come and attend our plenaries and seminars. This is not necessarily bad. Because it gives us the space to discuss openly, with honesty and self-criticism what is wrong with Europe, and what is wrong with us.

I believe we all understand our strategic defeat in the current political juncture. The crisis revealed the flimsy ground of the European integration, especially after the Maastricht Treaty in 1992 and at the same time revealed the dead-ends of neoliberalism. Even mainstream economists, like Joseph Stiglitz and Paul Krugman were explaining how the EU cannot be considered an ‘optimum currency area’ since there are multiple speeds of productivity among the countries, plus there is no sufficient budget to transfer capitals to the less developed economies.

The crisis brought out also the lack of solidarity among the member states, and solidarity is a requirement of any economic and political union. In contrast, what exists is a relation of mastery, what is applied is the Law of the Jungle, “the might is right”. Basically, an aspect of imperialism within the EU. This lack of solidarity was expressed in the sharpest way during the last 3 years with the “refugees’ crisis”, which is a crisis only because Europe refuses to accept these people in its borders. We saw countries building walls, and others refusing to accept even the statutory percentage of their respective shares.

Such a situation is generating a climate of euroscepticism that turns mainly to the far & populist right. Even the Brexit, regardless the promising landscape that's being shaped now with Corbynism, started as a campaign of the most conservative and xenophobic circles in the U.K. So, this kind of euroscepticism is one of the 2 scenarios that are now on the table. The other one is: the continuation of this very situation – business as usual – but with more deepening in federalism and in authoritarianism. It is likely that Macron will come to an agreement with Merkel (or with the Germans...). He will accept European Finance Minister etc... Therefore, what they are going to establish is a European authoritarian federalism. The Left should reconstruct itself against both scenarios by opening the door to 3rd one. This plan should be developed in distinguishing between the various “national Plan Bs” and the game of the eternal critical support to the EU that in the end captures the Left even in the most authoritarian plans.

We need to build common spaces of resistance, common solutions, alliances, not only in the “European level” generally, but also in the regional. We have to coordinate our work in the Southern Europe, in the Balkan countries, the Central Europe, etc. Of course we do not deny that the changes in national level are important, they are, especially if they are not confined to 1 country, that is small and economically powerless and depended, and certainly... I am thinking about Greece.

We all stand in a ground that seems like a quicksand. On the one hand, we have some moments full of promise, like the demonstrations in Hamburg against the G20 or the wave of re-politization

around Corbyn in the UK, a re-politization generated from very traditional leftist values. On the other hand, we are still in the middle of a crisis of political representation and representative democracy as a regime. The political passivity, as a cause and a result of this crisis, destabilizes the Left, as well as the social movements.

In this crucial period we remain static. Static because we have “learned” to wait for the next great event of the popular classes. We are waiting for the next huge demonstration, the next riot, the next *Indignados*, the next Sintagma square, the next *Nuit Debout*. And when we are not waiting for such processes, then we are preparing ourselves and waiting for the next elections. Whichever elections. But this is not a leftist strategy of our times. This is not even a political strategy. At all.

In a short conversation I had recently with a comrade, he told me that “It took 30 years to the Chicago Boys to finalmente achieve what they were fighting for.” They worked step-by-step, piece to piece, to establish neoliberalism as a doctrine for the majority of our modern world. This is the way we have to work/to do politics. Neoliberalism is not only an economic, political, institutional model. Neoliberalism constructs subjectivities and additionally, the way we perceive these subjectivities, the way we perceive ourselves. This is neoliberalism’s greatest achievement.

Our struggle should focus on how we will deconstruct the neoliberal meaning of life. Marx wrote that “The proletarians have nothing to lose but their chains.” That’s not true, or, it is partly true. They have a life to lose. How they realize themselves within society. How they have been trained to live, to love, to laugh. This is a huge project for the Left.

A very long-term project that demand patience, creativity, fantasy and networks. We have to put much effort on our networking and much of our resources in research, political education and ideological coherence.

The battle of hegemony requires time, people, brains and dedication. We should not expect that we will change the world within the next 5 or 10 years. Our strategy is essentially: To kill the heart of the beast, not just to cut his fingers. We should be concentrated in this: In order to overthrow capitalism, we must describe and present at least a particle of what we envision and it must be convincing and hegemonic. Let’s press our restart button.

A favorite quote of Eduardo Galeano is “History never really says ‘Good-bye’. History says ‘See you later’.” Well no, let’s tell to history “I’m here now”.