

The strategic debates of the European left - from Recommons Europe to the pandemic

Thursday 14 January 2021, by [PULIG Srećko](#), [SAMARY Catherine](#) (Date first published: 13 December 2020).

On 13 December as part of the “Subversive Festival” in Zagreb, two European zoom-panels were organised presenting the two texts translated into Croatian produced by the network Recommons Europe (see

<https://www.cadtm.org/ReCommonsEurope-Manifesto-for-a-New-Popular-Internationalism-in-Europe> and

<https://www.cadtm.org/Impact-of-European-policies-on-the-Global-South-and-possible-alternatives>). After having presented those texts in the newspaper Novosti

(<https://portalnovosti.com/u-potrazi-za-novim-manifestom>), the journalist Srećko Pulig interviewed Catherine Samary (see <http://csamary.fr>) - involved in this European network and participant in the first panel with Nathan Legrand from Belgium, Costas Lapavistas from the UK and Agnes Gagyí from Hungary. Below is the English translation of the interview published by Novosti, which evokes some strategic debates crossing the radical left raised in the panel.



Srećko Pulig - Q: Does the multidimensional crisis of the Covid19 mean that the “Manifesto for a new popular internationalism in Europe” is “outdated” as Costas Lapavistas expressed it in the panel?

Catherine Samary A: No, and yes, but ...

No, in the sense that the Covid does not appear in a serene capitalist sky. It is not, however, a simple catalyst of a “classic” crisis. But it amplifies a multi-dimensional crisis with “structural” dimensions, notably concerning the construction of Europe. Certain strategic responses evoked by the two texts of the Manifesto remain essential and must be inserted in the new contexts - from the cancellation of “illegitimate” debts to the demand for the socialisation of banks and the submission of monetary, financial and commercial relations to the protection of priority egalitarian rights against all the unequal relations that mark EU policy at the internal and international level. However, in addition to these continuities, I will also stress the persistence before and after the Covid of the debates and strategic divergences that have not been overcome within the radical left and Recommons.

Q: And what is the positive response to “obsolescence” (of the Manifesto) ?

A: Covid and its globalised socio-economic shocks impose an update of previous analyses and orientations! But in what sense? On 22 and 23 September I took part in a European meeting “Let’s take action - Internationalist alternatives to EU policies (in the time of the coronavirus)” organised by the CADTM (presenting the international part of the Manifesto of Recommons Europe with activists from the “peripheries” of the EU), with the support of the Citizens for Financial Justice and the Confederal Group of the European United Left/Nordic Green Left (GUE/NGL) - see <https://www.cadtm.org/Let-us-act-now-European-meet-18947>

This meeting already expressed in practice the need to “go beyond” the initial limits of the Manifesto as the reflections of a European think-tank aiming to avoid failures such as that of Syriza. In the new context it was a question of relying on a sanitary “shock” of great brutality that was both global and very unequal in order to demand a policy of solidarity and decolonisation that called into question the logics of market [profit](#) and competition. The aim of the meeting was to go beyond the compartmentalisation and dispersion of the campaigns conducted here and there (in Romania as well as in Spain, Belgium and France...) in defence of the “commons”, against the commercialisation of health in the face of Covid19 and an unprecedented globalised crisis. During this meeting, the comrades of Anticapitalistas (Spanish State) also presented their proposal for a campaign for a “European Covid tax” raising issues of control of taxation and European funds. The idea was not to repeat the aftermath of the 2008/9 crisis when the “debt crisis” was exploited by the EU institutions to impose new social (and therefore anti-democratic) attacks on the Greek people in particular.

Q: The question that concerns all peoples is: who will pay for the crisis and how will “aid” and fiscal resources be distributed and used at European and national levels?

A: Who will decide? The gathering outlined the main lines of response based on mobilisations demanding social and environmental justice, rooted in local and national levels but seeking to have an impact at European level through the organic links forged in the proposed campaigns.

During the Zagreb panel, Nathan Legrand, presenting the Recommons Europe network, evoked this meeting at the heart of Covid19 ; and I, for my part - obviously - supported Costas Lapavitsas on the fact that the new context of the pandemic imposed a “new phase” for the network that had drawn up the Manifesto and, beyond that, for the European radical left.

Q: But what lessons and support will the European left draw from this new context?

A: Costas Lapavitsas rightly pointed out the spectacular (albeit supposedly provisional) bracketing of the budgetary “Stability Pacts” that had been considered indisputable until then. And he insisted on the decisive role of the States, which must be subjected to pluralism of choice and control. But it should also be stressed that national budgetary policies, which have become expansive, have been based on the unlimited “unconventional” policy of the [ECB](#) buying back the securities of indebted states. Moreover, the new contradictions have raised new and broad debates about the status and role of the Central Banks, in particular the ECB, but also about the architecture and criteria of national and European (“community”) policies primarily concerning health - in particular vaccines, research and public services. All this raise therefore new contradictions within the EU about the determination of priorities ; basic needs to be met, revealed by the crisis, at the European level, are being questioned.

So, yes, there is a new context. But should it reinforce - from a left point of view - a generalised strategy of so-called ‘Left Exit’ - or Lexit - as part of the British left advocated ? I disagree with that as I argued in the time of the Brexit vote (cf.

<http://www.cadtm.org/Europe-No-LEXIT-without-Another>).

Q: Can you illustrate these debates?

A: First of all, let us stress what should be self-evident: shared Marxist and anti-capitalist convictions, as well as agreement on a radical critique of the dominant EU Treaties and policies, are not enough to provide a common up-to-date analysis of the major transformations of the capitalist past and present world-system - nor on how to fight in/against it. It is a global and not only European political issue for the entire anti-globalization left, which imposes democratic, pluralist frameworks for debate. The European left has a particular need for a return (with the eyes of the populations directly concerned) to the opacity of 1989/91 - I cannot develop this point here (cf. in particular <https://www.criticatac.ro/lefteast/revisiting-ambiguous-revolutions-1989/>).

In the Zagreb panel, I highlighted two dimensions that are debated in the analyses of the European radical left - notably with Lapavistas: on the one hand, even though German unification gave Germany a pivotal role, from the EEC to the current EU, I think it is wrong to present the EU as 'German'. First, there is a dominant Franco-German « binomial » and against the « German-Europe » concept, one should stress major conflicts which occurred between the non-conventional policy of the ECB and the "ordo-liberal" German constitution and its German defenders. Moreover, the policy that has been elaborated by the German-French leaders expresses transnational class interests. It is also important for the left to take into account what Agnès Gagyi (who took part in the Zagreb forum) brilliantly analysed on the basis of the Hungarian example: the existence of two transnational dominant currents, one "liberal globalist" instrumentalizing feminist and anti-racist stakes; the other liberal xenophobic-nationalist seeking an anchorage in the working class. They exist both in the dominant (core) countries and in the semi-peripheries. At the Zagreb forum, Lapavistas argued that one of the reasons for the strategic weakness of the Left was that it had lost its anchorage in the working class - in favour of feminist, anti-racist approaches. I disagree with this binary pseudo-choice. It is just as important for the Left to overcome « workerist » approaches that are blind to racist and sexist or homophobic dimensions as it is to overcome anti-racist or feminist approaches that obscure class inequalities.

Q: And what is your second highlight?

A: This underlines a second issue where I [share](https://internationalviewpoint.org/spip.php?article5796) the recent approaches developed by Samir Amin (see my text on this subject of a "new internationalism of the XXIst century": <https://internationalviewpoint.org/spip.php?article5796>): let us say synthetically that there is an (oppressed) South in the (dominant) North and a (dominant) North in the (dominated) South. In other words, it is necessary to combine the analysis of the unequal relations between nations with the concrete analysis of how the working and racialised classes, men, women, old and young, have been subjected to the destruction of the rights acquired in the past, first (in the 1980s and 1990s) at the very heart of the dominant countries. This is important for transnational alliances.

Q: Not all former socialist countries have experienced the same scenario of insertion into capitalist globalisation - and the specific role of China and Putin's Russia are also part of the necessary left-wing debates?

A: The Recommons Europe network has been only the beginning of a necessary European pluralist framework. It is far from being sufficient. It has allowed the expression of several partial divergences that are made explicit in the Manifesto; for example, two logics are presented on how to resist the Euro-system. While an "exit" is not excluded (depending on the context) and should be part of the scenarios and tactics discussed, the common axis is a radical criticism of the euro-system which includes the status of the ECB and fighting for a different monetary system - for example

using the euro as a common and not a single currency, and controlling the circulation of capital. One of the variants proposed is to set up “national fiscal currencies”: analogous to the “Treasury circuit” that was set up in France after the Second WW and proposed during the Greek crisis. The aim is to reduce dependencies on European and global trade, as some local currencies do, but with the possibility for the State of a monetary creation (reimbursed by taxation). This national “fiscal currency” could be converted into euros, however, it had to give priority to national solidarity networks in the crafts, agriculture and public services, essential for survival. This should help to resist the diktats of the ECB, without “exit” from the EU and without ceasing to denounce unjust and undemocratic policies and institutions. At the same time, the left-oriented popular coalition (like Syriza) would call on the peoples of Europe and fight for a different European system - trying to put in crisis the existing EU asking for a new constituent democratic process. These common proposals and battles could have been carried by a European left including Syriza - if it existed...

Q: You also mentioned the last, concluding chapter of the Manifesto on the panel. What does it contain that is important for our conclusion?

A: I also mentioned in the panel that this last chapter of the Manifesto present a strategy of struggle articulating different territorial levels of resistance (from the local and national to the European and international). Some of the signatories of the Manifesto believe that the European level is that of the Capital not of the workers - as struggles are so difficult to organise there. For others, including myself, it is necessary to tackle the vital need to build a “counter-hegemony” against all the interwoven relations of oppression, at all the levels where the capitalist system imposes itself on the dominated classes - men and women working in the services, the factories, the fields or at home - with respect for nature and the extension of social rights. The “principle of subsidiarity” means organising the control of choices at the most “efficient” scale according to the need to be satisfied, judged by the people concerned: the local and national levels are essential for some issues - not for others; and certainly not for breaking the logic of market competition and ensuring environmental and social justice. The “continental” level is intermediate both to “weigh” on global issues and to consolidate national struggles.

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• CADTM. 8 January 2021 :

<http://cadtm.org/The-strategic-debates-of-the-European-left-from-Recommons-Europe-to-the>