

Madrid, June 18-19, 2002

# The right-wing offensive and leftwards polarisation

Declaration of the Fourth Conference of the European Anti-Capitalist Left

Wednesday 10 August 2005, by [EACL](#) (Date first published: 19 June 2002).

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The political situation in the EU is at a turning point. If the German “Red-Green” government is defeated in the September 2002 elections, the EU will be completely dominated (except for Sweden, Greece and Finland) by an aggressive, reactionary right. Blair is just a false exception: a pioneering social-liberal who managed to build successive coalitions with various EU governments in preparation for the new antisocial, militarist offensive.

Since 1998-99, social democracy had led 12 of the 15 member states and the main EU institutions (the Council, European Central Bank, semi-annual summits and Intergovernmental Conferences). It did not use this exceptional power position in Europe, in particular in the three “pure left” governments in the EU’s three key countries (the UK, France and Germany), to break with neo-liberal policies. On the contrary, it made them even worse. The EFTU (European Federation of Trade Unions) and the national majority union federations maintained their allegiance to the EU and made no serious attempt to stop the bosses’ offensive. Social democracy bears the responsibility for the synchronised return of right-wing parties to government in almost every country and at the head of the EU.

This episode crowns a twenty-year cycle during which social democracy systematically fought to impose neo-liberal policies on the working class. This social regression, unprecedented in the past half-century, has hit the working class terribly hard and plunged millions of workers and young people into insecurity, misery and despair. Hence xenophobia and racism were able to win over not only middle-class layers but also sectors of the working class and youth.

Fascist and far right demagogues are exploiting this reactionary terrain. Traditional bourgeois parties are using it as well for their political manoeuvres. For the moment, it is not the advent of fascism which is on the agenda but “class struggle” bourgeois governments, whose main difference with “left” governments is that they will have their hands free to launch a new “European-neo-liberal” offensive: ongoing privatisations and antisocial measures; EU involvement in the international arena (“the war on terrorism” and eastwards enlargement); and putting in place the coherent, efficient core of a European proto-state apparatus.

But for the first time in twenty years, the ruling classes' political offensive is running up against a significant new social movement, borne by a new generation of youth, which is global, offensive, internationalist and against the system from the start. Defensive social battles, which have never ceased, are losing their "rearguard" aspect, because the movement against capitalist globalisation has provided them with a new political framework, an offensive spirit, a perspective and an alternative. The centre of gravity for political initiatives and mass mobilisation is located at the moment outside the traditional labour movement. Although weakened, the European trade union movement still brings together, according to national statistics, millions of workers and thousands of activists. As long as the wage-earning class, which is a majority social force, does not become active, as long as it does not struggle massively for its own immediate demands and broad aspirations, as long as it does not organise itself on an ever-widening scale, neither the ongoing globalisation of the market nor neo-liberal and pro-war policies will be stopped. The general strikes and gigantic citizens' mobilisations in Italy, the Spanish general strike, the recurrent social struggles in Greece and the renewal of sectoral strikes in Germany (particularly among metal and construction workers) clearly herald a stronger resistance to the bosses and governments' ongoing offensive.

In this framework, a "new" anti-capitalist and alternative Left is making visible, though still modest progress in several countries, including on an electoral level. From this point on, the political situation cannot be summed up as a new right-wing offensive. The new factor is that the political situation also includes a polarisation towards the Left in society as well as in the social and workers movement.

Faced with EU policies, the Conference takes a stand:

### **1. Against the US war and EU complicity, against the EU as a great power. A different Europe is possible - peaceful and based on solidarity!**

The EU has chosen to line up behind the policy of the Bush government. It aspires to join in US hegemony on a world scale, while putting itself forward as a rival. The EU accepts the US's general orientation ("the global fight against international terrorism"), its organisation (full commitment to and consistent reform of NATO) and its means (increasing military budgets and militarisation). But at the moment the EU does not share either the rhetoric, the will to take the offensive or the announced key objectives of US policy (war against Iraq - or Iran). This reflects both divisions within the EU and the private interests of the big European financial-industrial conglomerates, at a time when transatlantic conflicts are multiplying and intensifying on the economic level. The mythology of a "peaceful" and "generous" EU is breaking down. What the ruling classes want is a European great power.

We are continuing to mobilise, within the broad, unitary anti-war movement, against the wars that are under way (Afghanistan, Palestine, Colombia, the Philippines, Kashmir, Chechnya) or in preparation (Iraq, Iran), and against every kind of intervention, economic, diplomatic or military (Congo, Venezuela, Argentina, Zimbabwe, Pakistan, the Balkans, etc.).

In particular, we are preparing to warn the peoples of the EU against the imminent launching of a new war against Iraq. We demand:

- Unconditional withdrawal of the troops and navies of US and European imperialism;
- Immediate withdrawal of Israeli troops from the occupied territories in Palestine, suspension of the EU-Israeli treaty, respect for democratic and human rights, and the right of the Palestinian people to organise itself in a state with minimum guarantees for its survival;

- No increase in our countries' military budgets; no European army (and immediate dissolution of the already existing Euro-brigades); and
- Immediate withdrawal from NATO, leading to its dissolution.

The "defence of Europe" against real or imaginary military threats and against the aggressive pressures of US imperialism cannot be carried out by preparing for war, but rather through a radical social transformation of Europe into a space where social, ecological and democratic conditions and conditions of solidarity prevail - conditions that its peoples and workers would defend tooth and nail.

## **2. Against Fortress Europe: for freedom of movement and equal rights for all men and women! For solidarity and unity in the world of labour on a continental scale!**

a) The EU's governments, united for once, have decided on one of the most brutal and odious turnabouts in their recent history: to prevent and criminalize so-called "illegal" immigration by using their fleets in the Mediterranean and their armies on the borders with the East and the Middle East. But mass displacements of human beings are the direct result of large-scale surplus exploitation of a quasi-enslaved workforce and plundering of natural resources by big financial, industrial and commercial corporations, with absolutely unbearable features: endless repayment of foreign debt; hundreds of millions of starving human beings; and the new "war economy" which drives people and conscripts children into the army and the labour process. The same global capitalism that exploits, oppresses and kills arrogates to itself the right to track down, imprison, expel and over-exploit those human beings that run away from this hell in a search for refuge and survival in the countries of its "masters".

The EU's "solution" consists in developing and coordinating its special border police, transit camps, collective expulsions, sped-up "justice" and financial sanctions against immigrants' countries of origin on a European scale. For our part we reaffirm the right for all to freedom of movement, the right to asylum, the right to live in our countries with all the same rights as the native EU populations: in short, opening the borders and granting full citizenship to all.

b) The EU "is not full"! It has never been so rich! What "prevents" the equal social and democratic integration of the immigrant population is the shameless enrichment of a tiny minority of big capitalists - at the expense of the EU's native populations [working classes] - which refuses to organise society on the basis of the social needs of the great majority of the population here and abroad. This is a compelling reason to struggle together, unite the working class and eliminate this double injustice.

The EU's policies have two tragic consequences:

First, tracking of - legal as well as "illegal" - immigrants, against a background of xenophobia and racism, creates a fertile climate to impose the application of the EU's "antiterrorist" legislation. This is a real threat to democratic freedoms. For example, the Spanish government has finally succeeded in brutalising immigrants in Andalusia and outlawing Herri Batasuna, a legal, parliamentary party that represents a substantial sector of the Basque people. The overwhelming majority of the Basque people reject this decision and want a democratic solution involving recognition of its democratic rights.

Second, the bosses and government over-exploit this foreign workforce, which is malleable and subjected to virtual forced labour and has neither rights nor unions. In addition, while the

governments close the borders, they call for a new immigration policy that would enable them to grab hold “legally” of the most skilled workers from Third World countries, while agreeing “as a concession” to take charge as well of “the portion” of Third World sub-proletarians assigned to them. All this in the name of “supplementing the labour market” and “making up for the demographic deficit” (which is supposedly a threat to future generations’ pensions!).

The result is a humanly unbearable situation for immigrant workers and a menacing division within the world of labour. It generates exacerbated competition between native workers and immigrants, leading to a general regression of living and working conditions for both.

In this context of anti-immigrant discrimination and worsening living conditions for native working people, neo-liberal capitalism is setting off a war in factories, working people’s neighbourhoods and schools between the native-born poor and newly arriving poor. The stakes are day-to-day survival through access to a (backbreaking) job, (pathetic) wages, (ramshackle) housing, a (struggling) school and (cut-rate) medical treatment.

c) We need a radical, offensive response to this terrible danger.

We fight against any form of xenophobia or racism, whether of state or popular origin. We extend our solidarity to all the victims of the bosses’ and governments’ discriminatory policies. We demand immediate equality, and full social and political rights for all men and women who live in our countries. But we are conscious that it is necessary to deal with the roots of the problem: we have to fight and organise for solidarity and unity within the world of labour. To do this the labour movement must take a radical turn and stop setting native-born workers against those who are newly arriving and male workers against female. This means making organising newly arriving workers a moral and social priority, so that they share the same struggles, the same demands, the same organisations, and the same programme that puts “people before profits”.

d) The market annexation of the Eastern European countries, which is a genuine “periphery” dominated by the imperialist EU, will reinforce these developments even more. This absorption will not occur without a major crisis in the countryside and a considerable social regression in the cities, with a massive rise in inequality in each of these countries. All the more because the EU will impose its neo-liberal prescriptions without ensuring the promised transfers that are indispensable to relaunching these economies (the EU’s agricultural policy, structural funds and grants). It is up to the Eastern countries’ own peoples to decide whether they want to join the EU under these conditions. We will struggle inside the EU to ensure that they get the same social, environmental, political and democratic rights and norms that we have. We propose to the world of labour, women and youth to join in a single struggle for a different Europe. We will struggle for a trade unionism that unites male and female workers as well as all the emancipatory social movements throughout the European continent. The anti-capitalist Left commits itself to developing the best possible contacts and collaboration with the East European Left, which is active in social, political, trade unionist, feminist, environmentalist, anti-racist, pro-peace and anti-war and citizens’ movements.

As for Turkey, its laws, rights and policies at the level of political democracy are incompatible with those of EU member states. We support all the progressive forces in this country, still dominated by the military caste, in their struggle for a radical change on these issues. In particular, we are in solidarity with the Kurdish people, which is struggling for its national-democratic, political and cultural rights.

### **3. Against the despotic Convention: it is up to the people to decide!**

The EU's structure was despotic from the very beginning. The bulk of the executive, legislative and constituent power is now more than ever in the hands of the EU governments (especially those of the biggest countries), meeting in the European Councils of Ministers, the European Council of heads of state and government and the Intergovernmental Conference. The EU thus does not even reach the level of bourgeois parliamentary democracy that is left in its member states. This is how neo-liberal Europe escapes from the pressure of the working classes, who are being put in competition with each other, country-by-country, through unequal working conditions and social legislation. This is how it is trying to settle the multiple material conflicts of interest amongst its ruling classes, behind and on the people's backs.

The European bourgeoisies have set major objectives for themselves for the near future, all related to their search for a European great power: market annexation of the Eastern European countries; incorporating the UK, Denmark and Sweden into the monetary union (the euro); creating a single European financial market (related in particular to the privatisation of the retirement system); creating an "economic government", essential to synchronizing monetary and economic management with the European Central Bank; rapid activation of a European armed force, which could be also used to intervene in the major social crises that are looming in Europe; and reinforcing EU diplomatic, political and military intervention in the world arena.

All of this makes more necessary a profound reform that would make the institutions of the European proto-state more coherent, complete and strong.

This explains the mad rush forward that produced the Convention, whose selection, composition, method and objective are a simulacrum of democracy. Its only real objective is to equip the EU quickly with a small but strong and efficient executive, capable of confronting the growing financial, political and military instability in the world. This executive would dominate all other EU institutions. It will be directly subordinated to the European Council of member states' governments, and in the service of the big European corporations. In short, it will also be a more effective machine for waging war on the people and the wage earners, here and abroad.

This state apparatus is neither usable nor reformable for the peoples or the world of labour. It must be overthrown, so as to open up a radical democratic constituent process from below. It is up to the peoples and the world of labour to decide what kind of Europe they want to live in, with what sort of institutional relationship among the member states, and on what social and economic bases. Such a conquest of radical democracy will necessarily go hand in hand with overturning neo-liberal policies and replacing them with a programme of urgent social measures in the interests of the workers and the poorest layers of society. Starting now we must demand that at the very least any "new treaty" or "constitution" be submitted to a referendum organised simultaneously in all member and candidate states.

### **4. Break the neo-liberal yoke: "People before profit"!**

The neo-liberal offensive is based directly on the institutionalised coordination of the supranational European proto-state. It enjoys two considerable advantages: the EU treaties prohibit the world of labour from imposing its own social legislation (on wages, social security, the right to strike, hiring and firing, working time and pensions) on a European level. But on the other hand the European governments, united in the Council of Ministers or the EU Summits (as well as the European Central Bank), take the liberty of making illicit decisions on these social topics, in the name of the priority of

the (monetarist) criteria of the Maastricht Treaty and the Stability Pact.

The battle to privatise and liberalise is about to enter a new stage. The number one short-term priority is the liberalisation/privatisation of pensions, which have supposedly become “unaffordable”. That would bring billions of euros into European “pension funds” and would supply the indispensable foundation for the difficult constitution of a single financial market on the European level.

Moreover, the dismantling of public services (transport) and public enterprises (such as energy and water) will continue relentlessly, with its well known disastrous consequences: growing social inequality; insecurity for workers and users; disorganisation; and rising prices. Together with children, women are the first victims of neo-liberal policies. The relaunching, particularly under right-wing governments, of natalist policies and policies for restoration of the traditional family has aggravated the feminisation of the “new” poverty. This is also strengthening a homophobic mentality in society, despite some progress in terms of legal equality.

A particularly pernicious development is the recent decision to relaunch the nuclear industry. We from our side must reply by relaunching a full-fledged campaign for the (military and civilian) denuclearisation of Europe. This is just one of the (major) elements of the deterioration of the biosphere, which is being subjected more and more to the dictates of the market. We are in favour of a radical reduction of its global ecological impact (climate change, depletion of natural resources, pollution of the planet, destruction of the biosphere), whose central axis could be the general principle of precaution. The EU’s policies, pseudo-progressive by comparison with the US’s totally irresponsible policies in this area, are in no way an adequate response to the dangers now threatening the planet.

This neo-liberal dynamic cannot be halted with limited measures, because it has become systematic. Priorities must be changed radically: social needs for the mass of the population must come before the profits of big capital.

Our alternative programme is as simple, easy and clearly defined as the bosses’ neo-liberal one: a full-time, stable job, a decent wage, and a liveable replacement income (in the event of unemployment, disease, disability or retirement) for everyone; radical reduction of working time without loss of pay or intensification of work, with compensatory hiring; the right to housing, education and professional training and health care, all good quality; and access to means of public transport. These political and social rights will be equal for all workers, native and immigrant, men and women. Implementing them requires: a radical extension of public services; a recasting of the state budget (including the tax system) which drastically increases social spending; and a radical redistribution of wealth and income from capital towards labour. For this purpose all anti-capitalist measures must be taken that are needed to control and, if necessary, expropriate private property and transform it into social, public property.

We want to share these economic, ecological, social, political and cultural alternatives with all of humanity.

## **5. A different - anti-capitalist, European - Left is necessary!**

We, anti-capitalist parties and movements of Europe, are fighting against the EU, its institutions and policies, not in order to defend our national capitalist states, but in the name of a different Europe - social, democratic, peaceful and founded on solidarity. We are fighting for a radical policy reversal in the perspective of a democratic, socialist society, without exploitation of labour or oppression of

women, based on sustainable development- self-managing socialism from below.

This is a difficult road, and one that will take time.

The traditional labour movement and its dominant currents are in a historical crisis. Social democracy above all is hard hit. Having abandoned their traditional Keynesian programme, the social-democratic parties in government have systematically applied the neo-liberal programme and are accordingly profoundly discredited. This goes as well for other left parties that have been associated with it (notably in France and Germany). It is not likely that social democracy can return to its classical reformists roots. Today in opposition, it is preparing for its next period in government. It is not breaking with the social-liberal framework.

A space has thus been opened up to the left of the social-liberal "Left".

For the first time in many years, a political polarisation is taking place in Europe, clearly and visibly, in struggles, in the various social movements and trade unions and in elections. This anti-capitalist polarisation is developing, not on the basis of abstract ideological debates, but on the basis of big, earth-shaking events and the lived experience of the popular masses.

The struggle against the ("antiterrorist") war and neo-liberal policies, linked to capitalist globalisation, of which the EU is an essential piece; the central place of the "movement of movements" and its indispensable link with the trade union movement; the search for radical answers and for an anti-capitalist, anti-patriarchal, ecological and internationalist alternative - all these elements are pushing forward political clarification and convergence among organisations of this "new" anti-capitalist political current in gestation.

Facing the EU, its structures and policies, facing the advanced Europeanisation of the instruments at the disposal of the ruling classes, and the pitiful incapacity of the social-liberal leaderships of the labour and trade union movements, this anti-capitalist left must urgently adopt and propose a European-wide perspective. For it is at this level that the anti-capitalist battles, demands, perspectives and solutions are increasingly posed.

This is why the Conference considers the European Social Forum that will take place in November 2002 a major event for the rebirth of a combative workers and social movement. We will contribute as much as we can to making the ESF the rallying point for all the live forces in Europe, and a springboard for rooting the ESF in each of our countries. We commit ourselves to support its objectives and campaigns.

One of our major difficulties at this stage is reflecting social demands and the social relationship of forces on the political level in order to defeat neo-liberal policies. Our conclusion is that we urgently need to develop the perspective of a European political formation as a space and process in which social and political, anti-capitalist and alternative Lefts engage in discussion so as to move forward.

In that spirit we support the call of the PRC, member of the Conference, for an "Alternative Left Forum", which will take place in Italy at the end of October 2002. On the proposal of the Danish Red Green Alliance, member of the Conference, we will participate in the many activities of the counter-summit that will stretch out from September to December 2002, during the Danish presidency of the EU.

The organisations that come together in the Conferences of the European Anti-Capitalist Left are moving ahead. First, we are staking out our own political identity, made concrete through a "common logo". Second, we are setting to work on more detailed positions on immigrant issues and on the Charter of Social Rights, as a basis for joint activities. Finally, the next Conference of the

EACL, the fifth one, will take place in Copenhagen, in December 2002. It will be organised by the RGA.