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Statement of purpose

Taking stock of the universe of positions and goals that constitutes leftist politics today, we are left with the disquieting suspicion that a deep commonality underlies the apparent variety: What exists today is built upon the desiccated remains of what was once possible.

In order to make sense of the present, we find it necessary to disentangle the vast accumulation of positions on the Left and to evaluate their saliency for the possible reconstitution of emancipatory politics in the present. Doing this implies a reconsideration of what is meant by the Left.

Our task begins from what we see as the general disenchantment with the present state of progressive politics. We feel that this disenchantment cannot be cast off by sheer will, by simply “carrying on the fight,” but must be addressed and itself made an object of critique. Thus we begin with what immediately confronts us.

The *Platypus Review* is motivated by its sense that the Left is disoriented. We seek to be a forum among a variety of tendencies and approaches on the Left—not out of a concern with inclusion for its own sake, but rather to provoke disagreement and to open shared goals as sites of contestation. In this way, the recriminations and accusations arising from political disputes of the past may be harnessed to the project of clarifying the object of leftist critique.

The *Platypus Review* hopes to create and sustain a space for interrogating and clarifying positions and orientations currently represented on the Left, a space in which questions may be raised and discussions pursued that would not otherwise take place. As long as submissions exhibit a genuine commitment to this project, all kinds of content will be considered for publication.

Submission guidelines

Articles will typically range in length from 750–4,500 words, but longer pieces will be considered. Please send article submissions and inquiries about this project to: review_editor@platypus1917.org. All submissions should conform to the *Chicago Manual of Style*.

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There is significant ambivalence on the “far left” about opposing Trump and supporting Hillary. A more or less secret wish for Trump—that is either kept quiet or else psychologically denied to oneself—functions here. There is a desire to punish the Democrats for nominating such an openly conservative candidate, for instance, voting for the Greens’ Jill Stein, which would help Trump win.

Finding Trump acceptable is not outrageous. But the outrageous anti-Trumpism—that the relentless spinning out of the status quo defending itself—is actually not acceptable. Not if any political change whatsoever is desired.

In all the nervous hyperventilation of the complacent status quo under threat, there is the obvious question that is avoided but must be asked by anyone not too frightened to think—anyone trying to think seriously about politics, especially possibilities for change:

Why not Trump?

For which the only answer is: To preserve the status quo.

Not against “worse”—that might be beyond any U.S. President’s control anyway—but simply for things as they already are.

We should not accept that.

So: *Why not Trump?* **IP**

One change unlikely under Hillary that Trump advocates, shifting from supporting Saudi Arabia to detente with Russia, for instance in Syria—would this be a bad thing?

But everything is open to compromise: Trump says only that he thinks he can get a “better deal for America.” He campaigns to be “not a dictator” but the “negotiator-in-chief.” To do essentially what’s already being done, but “smarter” and more effectively. *This* is shocking the system?

When he’s called a “narcissist who cares only for himself”—for instance by “Pocahontas” Senator Elizabeth Warren—this is by those who are part of an elaborate political machine for maintaining the status quo who are evidently resentful that he doesn’t need to play by their rules.

This includes the ostensible “left,” which has a vested interest in continuing to do things as they have been done for a very long time already. The “left” is thus nothing of the sort. They don’t believe change is possible. Or they find any potential change undesirable: too challenging. If change is difficult and messy, that doesn’t make it evil. But what one fears tends to be regarded as evil.

Their scare-mongering is self-serving—self-interested. It is they who care only for themselves, their way of doing things, their positions. But, as true narcissists, they confuse this as caring for others. These others are only extensions of themselves.

Trump says that he “doesn’t need this” and that he’s running to “serve the country.” This is true.

Trump’s appeal is not at all extreme—but it is indeed extreme to claim that anyone who listens to him is beyond the boundaries of acceptable politics. The election results in November whatever their outcome will show just how many people are counted out by the political status quo. The silent majority will speak. The only question is how resoundingly they do so. Will they be discouraged?

Many who voted for Obama will now vote for Trump.

Enough so he could win.

This leads to the inescapable conclusion: Anti-Trump-ism is the problem and obstacle, not Trump.

The status quo thinks that change is only incremental and gradual. Anything else is either impossible or undesirable. But really the only changes they are willing to accept prove to be no changes at all.

This recalls the character in Voltaire’s novel *Candide*, Professor Pangloss, who said that we live in “The best of all possible worlds.” No one on the avowed “Left” should think such a thing—and yet they evidently do.

unacceptable. Mainstream economists say that Trump’s comments about this are not false but “unhelpful” because nothing can be done about it.

The neoliberal combination of capitalist austerity with post-1960s identity politics of “race, gender, and sexuality” that is the corporate status quo means allowing greater profits—necessitated by lower capitalist growth overall since the 1970s—while including more minorities and women in the workforce and management. Trump is attacking this not out of “racism” or “misogyny” but against the lowered expectations of the “new normal.”

When Trump says that he will provide jobs for “all Americans” this is not a lie but *bourgeois ideology*, which is different.

The mendacity of the status quo is the deeper problem.

For instance, his catchphrase, “Make America Great Again!” has the virtue of straightforward meaning. It is the opposite of Obama’s “Change You Can Believe In” or Hillary’s “Stronger Together.”

These have the quality of the old McDonald’s slogan, “What you want is what you get”—which meant that you will like it just as they give it to you—replaced by today’s simpler “I’m loving it!” But what if we’re not loving it? What if we don’t accept what Hillary says against Trump, “America is great already”?

When Trump says “I’m with you!” this is in opposition to Hillary’s “We’re with her!” —Hillary is better for that gendered pronoun?

Trump promises to govern “for everyone” and proudly claims that he will be “boring” as President. There is no reason not to believe him.

Everything Trump calls for exists already. There is already surveillance and increased scrutiny of Muslim immigrants in the “War on Terror.” There is already a war against ISIS. There is already a wall on the border with Mexico; there are already mass deportations of “illegal” immigrants. There are already proposals that will be implemented anyway for a super-exploited guest-worker immigration program. International trade is heavily regulated with many protections favoring U.S. companies already in place. Hillary will not change any of this. Given the current crisis of global capitalism, international trade is bound to be reconfigured anyway.

Trump’s claim to the Presidency is two-fold: that he’s a successful billionaire businessman; and that he’s a political outsider. His political opponents must dispute both these claims. But Trump is as much a billionaire and as much a successful businessman and as much a political outsider as anyone else.

Trump says he’s fighting against a “rigged system.” No one can deny that the system is rigged.

Trump is opposed by virtually the entire mainstream political establishment, Republican and Democrat, and by the entire mainstream news media, conservative and liberal alike. And yet he could win. That says something. It says that there is something there.

Trump has successfully run against and seeks to overthrow the established Republican 1980s-era “Reagan Revolution” coalition of neoliberals, neoconservatives, Strict Construction Constitutionalists and evangelical Christians

fundamentalists—against their (always uneasy) alliance as well as against all of its component parts.

It is especially remarkable that such vociferous opposition is mounted against such a moderate political figure as Trump, who until not long ago was a Centrist moderate-conservative Democrat, and is now a Centrist moderate-conservative Republican—running against a moderate-conservative Democrat.

Trump claims that he is the “last chance” for change. This may be true.

Indeed, it is useful to treat all of Trump’s claims as true—and all of those by his adversaries as false. For when Trump lies, still, his lies tell the truth. When Trump’s opponents tell the truth they still lie.

When Trump appears ignorant of the ways of the world, he expresses a wisdom about the status quo. The apparent “wisdom” of the status quo by contrast is the most pernicious form of ignorance.

For example, Trump says that the official current unemployment rate of 5% is a lie; there are more than 20% out of work, most of whom have stopped seeking employment altogether. It is a permanent and not fluctuating condition. Trump points out that this is

Why not Trump?

Chris Cutrone

the obvious question: *Why not Trump?*

IF ONE BLOWS ALL THE SMOKE AWAY, one is left with

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that it couldn't imagine a future outside of the Eurozone. This caused SYRIZA to reject its own policy and accept the austerity memorandum—to surrender and submit to the neoliberal European leadership. So, there comes a point at which the Left cannot remain attached to the dominant values of Europe without undermining itself. For Greece, that moment came in July 2015. It is old news now that there is only one Europe and we have to decide if we are going to stay within it, accepting these dominant values, policies, treaties, etc., or not.

Martin Suchanek: Let me briefly address what the comrade just said, that the EU is, and always was, an imperialist project. If we look at it today, it is obviously an emerging imperialist bloc that is dominated by one power, Germany, in collaboration but also conflict with other longstanding imperialist powers. From the standpoint of the ruling class, this is one of the reasons which makes it so difficult to unite the EU on a capitalist basis, because it means reorganizing and readjusting the relation not only between Germany, and say, Greece or Eastern Europe—countries which have been dominated by imperialism for a long period anyway—but also between the longstanding imperialist powers. One of the reasons why—despite the fact that the EU has become more important—Germany has been strengthening itself within the Union, is that the future of the EU, and the Eurozone as such can in no way be taken for granted. Indeed, they can implode because of these inner tensions. That is important to realize.

The EU is and always was an imperialist project, but obviously it was not always the same project. Since 1990, and since the global capitalist crisis of 2007-08 in particular, which is a new period of protracted crisis that is still far from over, there has been a struggle between the global imperialist powers for a redivision of the world. You have got the United States as the traditional hegemonic power, China as the new emerging power, and, of course, Germany as a leading power in Europe that wants to reorganize the EU in a way that makes it fit to take part in this race for world dominance. That is one of the reasons why any idea that we will see a policy which will be less "aggressive" is at the end of the day utopian, because the politics pursued by the German imperialist bourgeoisie, or other bourgeoisies in Europe, are dictated by inner class relations: They are trying to shift the cost of the crisis onto the working class, onto poor people, and so forth, but also pursuing a global struggle for the redivision of the world, which means making the EU a more effective, homogenous, and dominant power in the world.

We can see in Greece what this means in practice, how far the ruling class and the institutions in Europe are prepared to go to achieve their goals. Today, the fate of Greece is that it has become a protectorate of the European institutions. It is, even in formal terms, much less of an independent state than it was before. At the same time, an important conflict is brewing between Germany and France. Last but not least on this point, before I come to what we should do, we also have to see that the EU in a certain sense was also a response to the development of capitalism. The productive forces are trying to overcome barriers the nation-state traditionally erected against the further development of accumulation. Creating a large economic zone with one currency, making a common market for labor, goods, and so forth, is a process by which the bigger powers try to impose their will, but it is also a development that seeks to overcome the limits, the narrow boundaries of the national state. But, and this is important, under capitalism and imperialism this can only be done in a forceful way, by the subordination of the weaker states under the hegemonic rule of one or several imperialist powers.

Therefore, politically, we have to work within the EU just as here we have to work within the confines of the German state. It is not our choice, but at present we are unable to abolish or overthrow it. At the same time, we have to reject any idea or illusion that the EU can be reformed, that it can be made social. Even a social Europe would be a social-charvaunistic Europe. It would be a Europe that would give some breadcrumbs to the working class here and make some concessions there, but that would also be a powerful vehicle of world dominance.

The second point to make is that individual national states leaving the EU or the Eurozone under a capitalist market system will not solve any problems. Even an independent Greece with a drachma would still be a very dependent semi-colonial country, potentially in an economic situation even worse than now. One has to ask the question: Which class rules? Who actually organizes society? Obviously we would be, as a matter of conscience at least, in favor of allowing Greece to leave the EU if the Greek people wish to, but we should not advocate for Germany to leave the EU.

What is important as a counterposition is for us to put the question: What kind of social system do we need? What is or should be the actual class basis of a reorganized Europe? There is a need to unite Europe, to overcome the historic tensions on the continent, not just the states of the EU, but also the states outside of the union like Russia. We are not in favor of defending many small states, particular state boundaries, or that sort of thing. But, if we are to unite in a lasting way, in a way that is progressive, union needs to be combined with the question: Which class? Who rules? Who dominates here?

Therefore, we have to counterpose the question of a socialist Europe, a socialist United States of Europe, to the questions of either a reformed EU or withdrawal from the EU. Of course, this is a strategic goal, not something we can immediately pursue. However, we need a political and organizational discussion on the Left in Europe that seeks to answer the question: What is our program for reorganizing Europe? What is our program for providing an alternative to imperialist Europe? What are the steps to take, what kind of demands do we need to make, and how do we link them with each other? What would be the program of action, a transitional program on a continental level? In terms of making social demands, there is no difference in principle between fighting for a thirty-hour workweek in

Germany, or fighting for it in the whole of Europe. These kinds of things could unite social movements and the working class on a European level. We will all have to fight in the next period for open borders against racist immigration controls, against Fortress Europe, Fortress Bavaria, Fortress Berlin, or whatever else comes up.

We are facing a global political-economic crisis of capitalism as well as a deep crisis of the EU. It is not only an imperialist project. It is also a crisis-ridden project. In this situation, unlike say, for example, 1968 or previous movements, the radical left in Europe has failed to coordinate, to organize conferences not only on the question of strategy, but also on the question of how to actually fight collectively on the European level, how to collectively organize in this situation, how to pose our internationalism in practical terms as a political program. That is something we have to do, to get organized around, to bring forward. It is not just about agreeing on a few actions, but also about agreeing on our politics and program for overcoming and overthrowing imperialist Europe with a Socialist United States of Europe.

Responses

JR: We, the four speakers, have the same definition of the EU more or less. The divergences are with respect to the struggles. What can we understand from more contemporary experiences, such as SYRIZA's experience? When we think about SYRIZA we have two options. We can understand it as a reformist party that has betrayed the popular class struggle, and can conclude that we should create a more revolutionary party to overcome this situation. Then the problem is that a big revolutionary party is not able to connect with the population.

Then we have the other option, which is to understand the failure of SYRIZA as the lack of power of the popular and working classes, not as the lack of a revolutionary party in Europe or in Greece.

The problem is that we do not have power in society, or in the communities of the working class. If we understand this problem, we have to learn, for example, from the last mobilization of M15 in my country, which has nothing to do with revolutionary politics. It is a movement of people that makes democratic demands about corruption and similar things. We cannot focus on a more revolutionary situation in the future because it may never come. If we do not think about reconstructing the communities in society, our revolutionary party will have little appeal. If we want to learn something, we should think about our weakness in society and work on this point.

Thodoris Velissaris: Apart from a difference in strategy, I sense that there may be a different conception of the EU at work in these presentations. Some of you view it as a terrain of opportunity and others as an institution that must be opposed. Perhaps you can comment on that.

JW: I would not like to wait until the Socialist United States of Europe is realized. We need smaller steps to change society. We cannot wait until the magic moment where all these kind of problems are solved in the revolution. We have to be radical reformists in order to change the constellation within which we are fighting. Just as we are fighting in the national state, just as we understand the national state as a field of class struggles, gender struggles, struggles against racism, etc., in the same way we have to use and to accept the EU as a field of struggle.

In reference to SYRIZA, it was the great merit of SYRIZA that it demonstrated to the whole world what neoliberalism and the dictatorship of financial capital is about. They said, more or less, "You can kill us but you will not do so backstage. You will do it right here with the whole world watching." This was an important blow to the legitimacy of the EU and, indeed, of neoliberalism itself. Eventually, they were faced with the alternatives of one catastrophe or another, and there is no telling which was worse. Leaving the EU would have been a disaster, but we know who posed this question, the whole constellation of forces. We have to keep the whole line in mind. No small country is capable of changing the worldwide neoliberal constellation in one year.

NN: I completely agree that it was useful that Tsipras obliged the European leadership to shoot him in public, but the program that was killed was not of Tsipras, but rather that of Greek society. Tsipras is still in government, and he still negotiates with the European leadership.

In consideration of what the other panelists said, I want to emphasize that our strategy towards the EU is strongly dependent on the place and the time. Perhaps I would even say, if asked the same question a year ago, that a Grexit is not necessary for opposing the dominant policy. The social movements and political left in Greece could then unite together around an anti-austerity project.

But this is not the case today. It became clear that there is no alternative inside the EU, not for some kind of socialist reforms or socialist revolution, but even for the smallest reforms in favor of improving society or in favor of the working class. Perhaps this is not the case for other countries. But I would like to ask, if this is the case for one European country, perhaps it is the case for all the rest as well?

MS: I agree generally with Juan from Podemos, but we certainly have a difference over strategy and over what politics we should advocate. It is good that we discuss this openly because this something we have to deal with. Why did SYRIZA fail? What is the problem with radical reformism as a strategy? I'm not against fighting for reforms. That was never the problem for revolutionaries, that we must not fight for improvements. On the contrary, every working-class movement must struggle for better wages, better conditions, more democratic rights, and so forth. But the fact you have to face is that we are not in a situation like the 1960s anymore, when it was possible that the capitalist class, and capitalist accumulation could develop in a dynamic way and imperialist countries (but not the whole world) could incorporate a part of the working class by increasing their consumption and so forth. That period is simply over.

That is why neoliberalism is so strong and dominant. It is not because the bourgeoisie has decided to choose a different ideology. At the end of the day, the problem is one of the overaccumulation of capital, and declining rates of profit. That is what they need to address to make their system work again.

The problem cannot be addressed by making concessions to the working class over any length time. That does not mean that workers cannot win this or that struggle, but they will not be able to defend their gains in such a situation. Therefore, you have to link struggles and gains to a strategic objective. That is how you can make it clear to people in this system that we can make this or that improvement but, at the end of the day, they will fail. You actually need to have a political solution that goes to the heart of the matter, or you will be demoralized by social reality.

Q&A

Coming from the other side of the Atlantic, I was struck as an outsider by something peculiar in the European crisis, which is that the slogan of the "Socialist United States of Europe" was raised. Nobody ever seems to advocate for the very obvious notion of a bourgeois United States of Europe. Even the European bourgeoisie do not seem to be creating a federal union. Would you consider it progress, or regression, to have a united federal state in Europe on a bourgeois basis? And is that possible? What role does the fact that the EU is based on the nation-state play? How is that connected to the relationship of Europe to the United States on a global scale?

It seems to be U.S. policy to avoid total integration and the mechanism for this is Britain. Any thoughts about that? The other side to it is that, in the period of the most general strikes in Greece, the question of "Who rules?" is posed. It has now been answered. Who rules? In Greece, Merkel. The problem is that the EU is a way for the bourgeoisie across Europe to act in concert, and it can very easily crush a country like Greece, and much more easily crush smaller concrete experiments. I would like to suggest that what we need is a united political organization of the working class across Europe in a more coordinated fashion. Whether or not we believe in Communist parties, we have to pursue political projects on the Left at the highest levels of organization that we can on a continental scale.

MS: A federated states of Europe has not been realized because Europe is national-imperialist. National states dominate it, and who would want to bring about unification when it is not a federation of equals but the dominance of one? It would be progress, but under the imperialist constellation it is not realizable. It is only the working class who could unite Europe in that way. On the question of the United States and the EU, the problem is quite big. If we think about the Ukrainian situation, there is not only a conflict between the West and Russia. The United States has an interest in maintaining a permanent situation of tension on the border between two rivals. With regard to Britain, it is a bit of a Trojan horse for the United States within the EU, even though the British bourgeoisie is struggling over that question. We need to think about revolutionary unity on the political level in Europe and that poses the question of the revolutionary party in Europe—obviously beyond Europe as well. But, if we are not able to coordinate our activities at least as much as the bourgeoisie does, we will fail.

NN: About the perspective of a federated Europe for the organization of the EU, I have no specific opinion. The existing EU with its institutions and treaties is enough to promote the interest of the ruling class. I want to comment on the question of who is ruling Greece. I can accept it as a mode of speaking, but ultimately it is wrong to say that Merkel rules Greece. Greece is still ruled by its own ruling class—its own bourgeoisie. It is governed by SYRIZA and Alexis Tsipras, and this government has been re-elected in democratic elections. The enemy of social movements and the Greek left is inside our country: our bourgeoisie and our government. This brings us to the question about the possibility of coordinating social movements across Europe and of a united revolutionary party of the Left. My group, DIKTYO, has participated very intensely since the beginning in the European Social Forum in Florence as well as in other attempts at coordinating a European social movement. These attempts have very definite limits, and the victory of a social struggle still must be won on a national basis. Our enemy remains in our country. That does not mean we do not have to coordinate the resistance to neoliberal cuts all around Europe. But I cannot wait for the socialist union of Europe to overthrow neoliberal policies and neoliberal governments in Greece.

JW: Yes, the bourgeois "United States of Europe" is progress, and not just because there is no war between Germany and France. In the 1950s and 60s, there was a lot of labor migration to Germany from Spain, Portugal, Italy, and Greece. These workers were almost without social or political rights here. Now they are EU citizens, so they can apply for social assistance. These are small steps, but they nevertheless represent concrete progress. We all know that the welfare state came under pressure with the neoliberal turn, but this is nevertheless concrete progress in terms of the nation-state and the EU. The role of the U.S. is, of course, important. But I was surprised that, in the whole process between the Eurogroup and Greece, the role of the U.S. was not very significant. There were several phone calls from Obama to Berlin, but Germany obviously did not react. Not only is the crisis global in scope, U.S. hegemony is in crisis as well.

What would it look like if the Left were to become more truly international again? The question about trying to relate the EU to the U.S. and elsewhere is really important, because the Left across Europe is quite strongly anti-American in many of their attitudes. While the U.S. is a hegemonic power, sometimes this obscures the question

of solidarity with the working class in the U.S. How would you move from where we are now to a more international left? What happened to the Left that allowed internationalism to disintegrate?

How has internationalism manifested itself, in the last one or two years, within Europe, where we have Podemos and other new parties in Europe? How does such internationalism work out in your concrete political practice?

JR: With regard to the relationship Podemos has with SYRIZA, the problem is that we only have crisis regimes in Spain and Greece. We do not have a crisis regime [that is from Gramsci] here in Germany, the United Kingdom, or most of the other countries of the EU. That is the problem. We have contact with many parties, but not many parties have the possibility, such as exists in Greece and Spain, of taking advantage of the lack of consensus among political elites. Yes, we have a good connection with SYRIZA but, at the same time, it is important to construct these pan-European social movements or networks. Here in Germany, for example, you have had a strong movement against the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership. In Spain, nobody knows about that. We should work in that direction.

NN: Starting again from the issue of nationalism, I would propose a very rough schema: A nationalist left believes that its enemies lie outside of the country and its friends lie inside of the country; an internationalist left, on the other hand, thinks that its enemies are inside of the country and its friends outside. From this perspective, it is difficult to imagine what an international political organization of the Left would mean today, a period in which our enemies, the condition in every country, and the correlation of power in every society is so radically different. We could all dream of a new International, but we do not have it because it is impossible today. I do not want to say that an International is not desirable, or that it could not help the social struggles on the national level. We should start again from the movements that exist, and which have been coordinating for many years now. The solidarity movement for the Greek people, and the Greek government until July 2015, was a very good example that could bring results. Unfortunately, it was defeated when the SYRIZA government decided to retreat.

MS: With regard to the question of internationalism, what we actually need is an international political organization, an international party. The relation between the international party and its different sections in various countries can be similar to a national party, which has different branches in different regions, which, of course, work in quite different conditions. When I speak about a party, I mean a Leninist party, a revolutionary party. Just as a party can participate in elections for the German Parliament, it would be no problem to participate in the European elections, to use the European Parliament as a platform for propaganda, for denouncing the bourgeoisie, for blocking anti-working class legislation, and so forth. Of course, you cannot change society via a parliament. You need a socialist revolution to do that.

The reasons why a revolutionary party is not happening today seem to be more profound than a disagreement over what form of politics we should organize around. The EU project transformed rapidly after the collapse of the U.S.R.R. If we understand neoliberalism to have become a hegemonic force after the collapse of Marxist politics, then the world we live in, and the EU specifically, is an expression of a disintegrated and weakened Left. Can we examine the historical obstacles for founding an organization that has revolutionary socialist ambitions? Can we examine why—and maybe this is not desirable for everyone on the panel—it is not possible to found an international revolutionary party today that can fight in fundamental ways against the ruling powers in the EU?

MS: There is a series of historic failures by the revolutionary left, which in a sense deserves to be weak. Certainly, they make it very difficult to create a revolutionary organization. As a Trotskyist, I believe the Fourth International ceased to exist as a revolutionary organization in the 1940s-50s. And there are many organizations and trends that claim to be revolutionary or Communist today. You can accuse the KKE [Communist Party of Greece] of many things, but there certainly is no shortage of portraying itself as Communist. I will not say this is the model under which we should unite, but there is obviously the question of what you understand as revolutionary. You need to discuss political content, and program, and this includes both the analysis of the concrete situation and general truths about capitalism and the need to overthrow it. It means discussing what kind of demands to put forward, and how to systematize them with a strategic goal. Also we have to be clear that the groups that claim to be revolutionary today are far from being parties. The problem will not be overcome by a fusion of all these groups, because that would just mean combining confusion and ignoring differences.

JW: There are several problems with a revolutionary party. From the 1970s to today, we have had maybe two thousand revolutionary "mass organizations" in Germany. Obviously, the revolution did not happen. So, maybe, it just does not work. In my view, a Leninist party is a threat. We had two great social movements that failed: the social-democratic movement and the Communist movement. Both failed, in my view, because they were authoritarian and were oriented towards the state. They were statist. They wanted to change society from the position of, and with the power of, the state. This does not work. But the most important factor is the authoritarian structure of these parties. Rosa Luxemburg's critique took aim at the authoritarian tendencies in Leninist parties. The problem is not just Stalin, as it precedes him. So what is the right way? I do not know, but certainly it has to be generated from below, because

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the revolution has to be democratic. It is impossible to make a blueprint for how we should organize and where we should go. A new movement has to organize in new ways, and has to find its own language. We cannot go back a hundred years for solutions to our problems. Society has changed and we have to change if we want to transform this capitalist society. I am not against parties in principle, but even a party like SYRIZA or Podemos will fail without a strong movement in the streets.

SYRIZA and Podemos are products of the weakness of the movements, not of their strength. So, if we want to be concrete in our analysis of the historical situation, we have to address this. As Juan said, Podemos has its background in the failure of the Left. There is a weakness on the level of society, so that the capitulation of SYRIZA was not a failure of SYRIZA but a failure of the people. During the negotiations we had the biggest demos in Greece after 2011, so I would like Juan to clarify what he means. And what is the lesson that Podemos can draw from SYRIZA's experience in terms of its clash with the EU?

JR: First of all, I did not say that it was a failure of the people. Rather, it stemmed from the weakness of social movements and, thus, of the power of the people. SYRIZA and Tsipras chose to negotiate with an agenda of the party, not of the people. We need people to establish the political agenda, but not in one negotiation. This is a problem not only in SYRIZA's case, but also of a lack of power in general in the EU. It was only SYRIZA standing against all the hegemonic powers in the EU. We should learn from SYRIZA that, within a small country and without power, it is difficult to change conditions. Spain is a major country in economic terms, we have 12 per cent of GNP, but still that is not enough. If we do not force the social democrats in Europe to change their policies, we are not going to be able to change anything in the EU. SYRIZA thought they would try talking to Matteo Renzi as well as other social democrats, and change their minds. Obviously, it is not a matter of how we think; it is a matter of power. We must force such people to change their politics, and use the contradictions to find a way to go forward.

NN: You can probably remember two or three years ago when Alexis Tsipras was speaking against Madame Merkel. After all the lengthy negotiations, I learned from the process that the EU was, from its very beginning, built in the last instance to prevent any radical social change. During the most recent period, it has been transformed into an apparatus for imposing neoliberal changes. From this point of view, the Greek movement needs to promote an exit from the EU but not unconditionally. But under what conditions could the majority of society, the lower classes, be persuaded to take that risk? And, of course, it is a precondition that such a rupture could only come with a left government in power. I remember a question from a friend who asked what we would do if, in three or four years after Grexit, a right-wing party won the elections? In fact, if a Grexit happened, we would likely have a right-wing party winning the election that followed. But, in my view, what Rosa Luxemburg said applies here—that the history of the labor movement is one of moving from failure to failure, thereby enriching its experience and opening new paths to a different country or to another movement. From this point of view, I would like to answer the previous question about the socialist union of Europe. I think the Socialist United States of Europe is a very good slogan or vision, but I prefer the vision of Christian Rakovsky, a socialist union of the Balkans. We would have much more in common. But this is not something we can put forward today. What we can do is cause some ruptures that may open the way for the socialist union of Europe, or the socialist union of the Balkans, or some radical change we have in mind. The first rupture of that kind might be Grexit.

MS: Regarding the question of the state, you cannot maintain a state apparatus that served the ruling class for ages, as the SYRIZA government did. They even failed to oust some of the most prominent figureheads of the departments and so forth. In that situation, you have to work with an apparatus that actually functions in the interest of the ruling class, an apparatus that forces you to change your politics, sabotages you, and so forth. So, if you do not take that apparatus apart and replace it with something else, soviets or so forth, you will fall victim to it. So the question of the state, of the need to dismantle it, to smash it, to break it apart, whatever you want to call it, is a question that must be raised. With regard to the most recent point about the party and what kind of organization we need, obviously we have a difference with regard to Leninism. There is no question about that. However, we have to be careful not to say: "Here you have the awful Lenin and then the even more awful Stalin. And maybe Trotsky wasn't such a bad guy, but he was quite similar to Lenin." And then one has to bring in Rosa Luxemburg. That does not work at all, okay? You can understand this by examining her practice in the Social Democratic Party in Poland. You can see it in her writings. If you think about her conception of the relation between the trade unions and the party, one can misuse and misinterpret what she says, but she was certainly not as spontaneous, in the strict sense of the word, as people claim she was. Last but not least, the same would apply to good old Karl Marx. If you look at *The Communist Manifesto*, how is the Communist distinguished from the other proletarian or working-class parties? By consciousness. It is, so to say, ideas about strategy, about the program, about the general task and the tasks of the movement. That is what we have to bring into the movement. If we are not doing that, we fail in our task as Communists. **IP**

Transcribed by Reid Kotlas, Brian Schultz, Jan Schröder, Hannah Schröder, Adam Rothbarth, and Jerzy Sobotta.

Paralysis of will: Bernie Sanders's capitulation

Boris Kagarlitsky



Former Democratic presidential candidate Senator Bernie Sanders exits the stage after addressing the Democratic National Convention in Philadelphia on July 25, 2016.

THE U.S. DEMOCRATIC PARTY CONVENTION in Philadelphia ended with a big schism that divides not only the supporters of Hillary Clinton from her opponents, but also Bernie Sanders from the movement he led until not very long ago.

The senator from Vermont who attracted thousands across America to his rallies and ignited them with his speeches looked helpless—even ridiculous—in Philadelphia. In a matter of seconds, his speech endorsing Hillary turned a charismatic leader who embodied the hopes of millions into a pathetic old man who does not understand what is happening around him. With a confused smile on his face, he repeated that Hillary would be the next president, that the party adopted the most progressive platform ever, coaxing his indignant supporters to, "live in the real world."¹ Clearly, Sanders demonstrated a lack of connection with the new political reality that made possible his ascent to prominence in the national political arena.

Ptied at best, Sanders garners very little support now, yet young followers ask that he not be criticized too harshly, since it was he who awakened them and brought them together.

But it is a mistake to attribute their own accomplishments to him. In the last 20 years, a candidate similar to Sanders has appeared in almost every primary election, only to be filtered out in the early stages of the campaign. The fact that Bernie did not meet the same fate is not explained by his talents and merits but by the long overdue need for social change in American society, which accumulated over the years and suddenly burst out into the open. This need was generated by a systemic crisis and the unresolved contradictions of neoliberalism. Motivation was needed for this sentiment, particularly acute among young people, to turn into a political movement. Bernie's decision to run for the Democratic nomination provided it. As long as his speeches reflected the mood of the people, they carried him along. But when the time for serious political decisions came, the senator from Vermont failed to lead, becoming completely helpless.

Of course, what happened cannot only be attributed to the personal qualities of one person. What can be characterized now as Bernie's Philadelphia capitulation was prepared during his campaign by left intellectuals close and not so close to him. All of them—from Noam Chomsky to Michael Moore—unanimously repeated that Donald Trump, a brawler and a racist, is the main danger, and that support for Hillary is the only way to prevent the catastrophe that would happen if the Republican candidate were to win the election.

Now these people are in a panic: They managed to break up Sanders' movement, forcing him to surrender, then suddenly realized that the most likely outcome would be a victory for Trump. Considering electoral fraud and corruption of the Democratic Party apparatus, millions of people reasonably concluded that Trump is not the "greater evil" today in America. Sanders' capitulation tore the last moral excuse from the Democrats' political rhetoric. For those who followed the campaign hoping for change and who realize how deep the impending crisis is, it became clear that nothing good can be expected from these politicians. After all, even the best, most honest candidate surrendered shamefully!

If Trump wins the election, we could argue with complete certainty that Sanders predestined this outcome the moment he expressed his support for Clinton, thereby betraying not only his supporters, but also American democracy. Now it is the moral duty of any decent American to punish the Democrats. All of them. Including Bernie. And they will do it, even if they do not vote for Trump: They will stay home, or vote for the Green Party candidate, Jill Stein, or the libertarian candidate, Gary Johnson, clearing the way for Donald Trump.

This will be the beginning of a new epoch for the United States and the world, in which the neoliberal consensus will be replaced by the uncertainty of risk and freedom. In reality, we know very little about Trump today, aside from his politically incorrect statements, which do not really matter since they do not lead to any specific actions, except for the laughable project of building a border wall. But if Trump is really half as dangerous as the liberal mass media insists, he cannot be stopped by lackluster support for the "lesser evil." Only the enthusiasm of a mass radical mobilization around an alternative program of transformation can stop him, the program Sanders proposed for a year, then abandoned in Philadelphia.

One cannot make an omelet without breaking eggs. And if concern for eggs is uppermost, the omelets cannot be made. The trouble is that all the efforts of the politically correct egg protectors are worthless. In the course of the story, eggs will be broken one way or another, however omelets will not be made.

The policy of a "lesser evil" is a recipe for disaster. In a period of crisis, minimizing risk does not work, but instead results in the worst possible outcomes. In the situation of a more than likely Trump victory, only those on the Left who did not support Hillary will survive politically. Everybody else will drown together with her. Attempts to preserve the integrity of a mechanism that does not work are fraught with apocalyptic disasters on a planetary scale. In the conditions of an unending crisis, the calls of the Left to accept the lesser evil to avoid the greater evil will lead us from one disaster to another.

Capitulations of the Left are not accidental. There is one reason behind all of them: rejection of the simple principles that define the left movement. Half a century ago, these principles were self-evident, but today it is time to recall them. *The first is class interests.* Not the abstract demagoguery of sympathy toward the weak, inclusiveness, and minority rights, but the specific interests of real working-class people, including the "white males" so despised by liberals. In fact, "white males" is a notion invented by liberals specifically to undermine class solidarity and discredit the labor movement. In reality, about half of "white males" are women, and no less than a third are representatives of non-white races. But it does not matter to the liberal discourse. The logic of unity in order to solve joint problems and achieve common goals is portrayed in this discourse as an attempt by "white males" to discriminate against minorities with their special interests. It does not matter that the defense of special interests leads not only to discrimination against majorities, but also generates a "war of all against all" in which minorities are the first to suffer. The goal of this politics is not to protect minorities, but to fragment society, while allowing the liberal elite to re-distribute resources among the minorities.

A recent Sanders supporter noted in an internet discussion of his capitulation: "The senator from Vermont had to decide what is more dangerous—Trump's homophobic rhetoric or the dictatorship of financial capital promoted by Clinton. He concluded that homophobic rhetoric is worse."

I have to admit that this is the most accurate description of the "real world" according to Sanders.

The second historic principle of the Left was the notion of historic perspective and building a strategy based on it. In the 1930's, politicians as different as Roosevelt, Trotsky, and Stalin shared this definition, based on the urgent problems of development, whose resolution is the essence of progress. It is telling that the liberal left in the U.S. continues to identify itself as "progressive," although currently they do not even discuss the essence of historical progress, aside from organizing a few humanistic events.

Meanwhile, the issue is more than clear: Overcoming neoliberalism is the urgent historic task of today—not because we do not like this system, or because it does not correspond to our values, but because it has *exhausted its potential for development* and can only survive by devouring the resources needed for the basic reproduction of society. In other words, the longer this system remains the more it will self-destruct and undermine our livelihoods.

The historic perspective is connected to class interests by the answers to simple pressing questions: Will jobs be created that not only allow survival, but also the cultural, professional, and moral development of workers? Will unions and other worker organizations be strengthened? In the course of the last two and a half decades, the Left in union criticized neoliberalism, a system of international trade that weakens and de-solidarizes the working class. However, it is reluctant to admit that the opposite principle is also true: *Under conditions of capitalism only protectionism strengthens workers' positions in the labor market, labor unions and political organizations based on them.* Western European protectionism gave birth to a powerful social-democratic movement, while support of domestic industry by the Russian governments of Witte and Stolypin created the conditions for the Revolution of 1917.

Without the old industrial countries transitioning to protectionism, consolidation of the labor movement in the countries of the Global South, which also need to

protect their own markets and their own industry, is also impossible. Democratic control and a welfare state are also impossible without protectionism. Bernie's campaign raised these issues, but when the question arose which is worse—Trump's protectionist program with its anti-Muslim and anti-Mexican flavor, or Hillary's anti-social agenda packed into a politically correct lexicon, the choice was made in favor of the latter. Millions of American workers regardless of the color of their skin, gender, or sexual orientation will make a completely different choice. By voting for Trump they are not reacting to his scandalous rhetoric, even if they like it, but rather making a thoughtful decision based on their interests as laborers under the conditions of capitalism.

Trump only needed his scandalous rhetoric to attract the attention of the lower classes of society, to send them a signal, to stand out from a homogenous mass of dull political figures. Now is the time for a substantive discussion. Neoliberal politics has to be dismantled; the societal model has to be changed. If protectionism becomes a fact, the preconditions for a new social state will be created, a basis for a new popular movement without Sanders and the liberal left will arise.

The third principle, which was always fundamental for left politics, is the struggle for power. Precisely for power, not representation, influence or presence in the dominant discourse. It is telling that it was precisely Sanders' attempt to start a real struggle for power that caused the indignation of many left radicals, who perceive this as completely obscene. On the contrary, when the Vermont senator abandoned his positions, he consoled himself and his supporters with the fact that the Democratic Party adopted the most progressive platform in its history, although anyone who knows how the American state really works knows that this program is not worth the paper it is written on. All the levers of power (not only in the administration, but also in the party) are in the hands of the people who will never allow these ideals to be realized.

The struggle for power requires an organization and much more rigid mechanisms of mobilization than network structures. But most of all, it requires a strong will and political independence. That is why, as frustrated and bitter as Sanders' betrayed supporters are, the alternative for them should not be the support of Trump. The main problem with Trump is not that he is a misogynist, but that he is a capitalist. Sure, his victory may be a necessary step in order to overcome neoliberalism and dismantle the corrupt political system, but it will not lead to a positive social program. This can only happen with a consciously built progressive organization in the true historic meaning of this word. Will it be built around Jill Stein and her Green Party, or will it be created by the activists who came out of the Sanders' movement, we will know the answer in the near future. However, it has to be built now, irrespective of its chances of prevailing in the current political cycle. Political struggle requires patience and perseverance.

The political transformation, which is currently under way in the United States and Western Europe, is changing the conditions under which people in the entire world live and struggle, opening new opportunities for them. The opposite is also true: SYRIZA's betrayal, Sanders' capitulation, Corbyn's wavering are not just issues of Greek, American, or British politics respectively... These are failures for which not only the Left, but all of humanity will pay the price.

The neoliberal system, which the likes of Hillary Clinton and François Hollande are trying to preserve, is already so dysfunctional, so decayed that every day it survives undermines the basic means of societal reproduction. If we are not ready to fight for its deconstruction, it will break down naturally. But the alternative will not be a new social order imagined by anti-globalists, but rather chaos and barbarism growing spontaneously.

A paralysis of will, which struck the left movement during the epoch of neoliberalism, must be overcome. A global drama, in which everyone will have a role, is about to start. We must accept responsibility for risky decisions, understand that we cannot be nice to everybody, and that we cannot win without struggle and sacrifice. **IP**

¹ Bernie Sanders, prepared remarks for 2016 Democratic National Convention. Available online at <https://berniesanders.com/sanders-prepared-remarks-at-democratic-national-convention/>.

What is the European Union and should we be against it?

Juan Roch, Jens Wissel, Nikos Nikisianis, Martin Suchanek



Protestors march in Berlin on September 25, 2012 under the slogan "Athens, Berlin, and Madrid—together against austerity!"

On November 7th, 2015, at its Second Annual European Conference in Frankfurt, Germany, the Platypus Affiliated Society hosted a panel addressing the topic "What is the European Union and should we be against it?" The discussion was moderated by Thodoris Velissaris and included the following panelists: Juan Roch, a member of the Spanish political party Podemos; Jens Wissel, a founding member of the Assoziation für Kritische Gesellschaftsforschung and author of Staatsprojekt Europa: Grundzüge einer materialistischen Theorie der Europäischen Union; Nikos Nikisianis, a member of DIKTYO (Network for Political and Social Rights) in Greece, an affiliate of SYRIZA until July 2015; and Martin Suchanek, a member of Gruppe Arbeitermacht, the German section of the League for the Fifth International, and the editor of its theoretical journal Revolutionärer Marxismus. What follows is an edited transcript of their conversation. The full audio recording of the event can be found online at <<http://platypus1917.org/2015/12/16/11-07-2015-what-is-the-european-union-and-should-we-be-against-it/>>.

Panel Description

A united and peaceful Europe seemed a distant dream for the generation that went through the experience of war and destruction in the first half of the 20th century. In the latter part of that century, this hope did eventually gain shape and reality in the European Union. Despite its official proclamation of peace, social well being, and an alternative to both capitalism and communism, today the European project finds itself in a prolonged crisis, with uncertain expectations. The refugee crisis, the euro crisis, massive austerity, increasing curtailment of democratic principles, a growing division between powerful and weak economies, and Germany's new hegemony—all these appear in stark contrast to official European values and solidarity.

The desperate struggle of SYRIZA to resist austerity demonstrated the necessity and seeming impossibility of the Left across Europe to answer the mounting crisis with a politics that was truly international, and able to go beyond "resisting austerity." Despite growing social unrest, the deep ambivalence towards the EU expresses itself in the Left's inability to formulate a coherent vision of a political alternative. At the same time, the rejection of the EU is ceded to a growing right. What is the EU for the Left today? Should the Left seek to overcome the present impasse on the basis of the EU itself, or by rejecting it altogether? The clarification of the EU's nature and the appropriate response to it seem to be one of the most pressing issues for the Left on the continent and beyond.

Opening Remarks

Juan Roch: I am going to discuss three different positions with regard to the European Union as well as its limitations and potentialities. These positions represent contrasting views on the Left. The first position is that of what I call the naive globalist left, which considers the EU intrinsically positive, links it to internationalism, and fails to problematize its institutional design and accumulation strategies. The second position is that of the anti-globalist left. This is the left that considers the EU intrinsically negative, and considers any participation in it counter-productive to empowering the working class and the population more generally. This position applies Marx's classic phase regarding the state—that it is a committee for managing the common affairs of the bourgeoisie—to the EU. In contrast to these positions, I am going to advance the case, that of Podemos, for productive intervention and participation in the EU.

I want to clarify what the EU is. It is typically defined as an institutional complex—norms, regulations, decision-making bodies, etc.—but usually people fail to recognize that it is embedded in a world market and world society. These place important constrictions on the EU's institutional designs. I am not going to revisit the whole history of the EU, but I will refer to two crucial points that are important for understanding its current state. The first is the political and economic project of the Washington Consensus which began to emerge in the 1970s, an accumulation strategy that consists of economic de-nationalization, the dismantling of the welfare state, and the weakening of the organized power of the working class in Europe and throughout the world. The second point is the Maastricht Treaty in 1993 and the Lisbon Treaty in 2007, which both prioritized the

free market and free mobility. Following Bob Jessop, I argue that these events have transformed the post-war Keynesian welfare state in Europe into a "post-national welfare regime." This regime consists of four tendencies: (1) systematic competitiveness, innovation, and enterprise in Europe; (2) the subordination of social policies and the demands of labor to market flexibility and "free trade"; (3) the gradual transfer of competencies from the national level to the European level and vice versa; and (4) the creation of a complex network of power at the Europe-wide level that has led to the EU's well-known "democracy deficit."

With the crisis of 2008, existing trends accelerated. The crisis was supposedly an opportunity for the Left in Spain and Greece, but it was primarily an opportunity for the elites and their project of further eroding the welfare state and the rights of workers, both in Spain and elsewhere. This put the Left in a defensive stance. The strategy for struggle when there is a powerful and organized working class is very different from the one necessary in the current situation, with a weak working class, little social organization, and an offensive launched by the elites. It is important to reflect on these different situations when determining strategy. While SYRIZA failed to implement its program, their struggle provided important lessons for the Left, above all through its politicization of the European landscape.

Regarding the Left, the key elements of Podemos and SYRIZA we can mention here are that these parties are trying to put the symbolic references of the Left in a secondary position and to appeal directly to the common sense of the popular classes. What does it mean that they are re-elaborating the classic demands of the Left in another, different guise? I do not think this in itself expresses the supposedly reformist essence of these parties. Rather, it stems from the historical defeat of the Left and the current offensive of the elites. Trying to label the new left-wing populist parties in Europe either reformist or revolutionary is not useful. They are responding to a new situation.

What can we do now in Europe? It is important to be aware that we need parties. We need platforms with different formulas and we need to contest elections at both the national, and European levels. At the same time, we must create a different model of political party. The Spanish experience has taught us that the structure of the traditional parties is inadequate. They are not productive for the struggle of the popular classes.

There is no European universal narrative of the Left. We believe that it is necessary to create national political organizations and to consider how the defeat of the Left has played out differently in various countries. In Europe, we should generate a network of different social movements—this sounds difficult, but is happening already. We should create a strategy of reform to be advanced both through political parties and through a pan-European network. We defend a minimum program in Europe that takes into account the situation of the historical defeat of the Left. The minimum program includes democratized institutions, wealth redistribution, and further the politicization of the people to create a new social order and an alternative economy. However, we are aware that at this moment we cannot immediately achieve all our goals.

It would be wrong and hasty to conclude that the EU is not a terrain of political struggle. In Podemos we believe in fighting the economic and political elites everywhere, on the television, in the European Parliament, in the Spanish Parliament, and across all of the institutions; even while taking into account that we have limited possibilities for action nowadays.

Jens Wissel: We were asked: "How can the project of the European Union be described in political-economic terms, and in whose interests is it?" The EU project changed over time and has different aspects, but European integration was from the beginning an elite project as well as a project of the national states. Until the beginning of the 1980s, it was nonetheless part of the Keynesian-Fordist constellation. Fordism is a term that describes the post-World War II mode of regulation and accumulation, which was characterized by mass production, mass consumption, the welfare state, and relatively secure labor relations.

This Keynesian-Fordist constellation changed with the crisis of Fordism, which led to the internationalization of production and part of the dominant class, the

changing relations of forces inside the national states, and the failure of Keynesianism. So, at least since 1986 with the Single European Act, the EU has been dominated by neoliberalism. The new constellation realized Margaret Thatcher's famous proclamation: "There is no alternative." Since then, the EU has more and more served the interests of major corporations, European export companies, and financial capital. The attempt to forge a social and political union failed with the crisis of the old constellation, with the consequence that today the EU functions something like a deregulation machine.

The EU switched to the neoliberal mode of integration and became a major threat to the welfare state. However, it is important that this threat not be understood as an external pressure, as it is often described in the globalization debate, which portrays globalization and the threat to the welfare state as coming from outside. On the contrary, globalization and Europeanization are coming from inside the national state, from the changing relations of power within it, and from the international relations of the dominant class. These caused the national state itself to seek to create a new neoliberal European constellation.

Europe is not neoliberal because of the EU. It is the other way around: The EU is neoliberal because of Europe, because of the neoliberal member states, and the fundamental transformation of the relations of force inside the European member states. Thatcher first introduced neoliberalism in Europe, and later Kohl, Blair, and Schröder. We have to overcome the inside/outside dichotomy in our understanding of the EU.

What does this mean for the Left? Theoretically, one conclusion of this perspective is that we should realize that the European constellation is much more complex and intertwined, with the national state apparatuses forming an integral element within a new ensemble of European interconnected state apparatuses. This means that the political movement has to act on all these different levels or scales: the European, national, regional, and even local level. The Europeanization of protest and resistance is long past due, and it is on the way: The Blockupy movement, the Occupy movement, and many other examples point in that direction.

In this sense, it is necessary to fight against neoliberal restructuring on the national level as well as on the European level. It was good to mobilize against the European Central Bank and against the free trade agreements with the United States, and with Canada. I agree with Juan that we have to use the EU as the institutional field of our struggles. We can, for example, attempt to use the European Court of Justice to strengthen human rights. This means resisting the violation of human rights along European borders as well as the violation of human rights and labor rights entailed by austerity policies.

It is an illusion to think neoliberalism will end if and when we overcome the EU, or the euro, or whatever. Neither the EU nor the euro have significance in and of themselves, which is not to defend a currency and institutional framework that are obviously part of the neoliberal constellation. The point is that re-nationalization is not an option for a left-wing movement. You cannot organize your politics only on a national basis, or leave the EU altogether. This would strengthen national populist and national neoliberal forces, and we should not forget that the first strong neoliberal movement was in the U.K. where it took a national populist form.

We have to break the neoliberal hegemony and its structural power. Of course, neoliberal hegemony is in crisis already, and not just in the European South, but here too. This crisis does not necessarily lead to the Left's success. It also poses the danger of right-wing movements. Crisis leads to fear, and fear leads to regression. To counter this danger the Left has to create concrete alternatives, ones that can be realized incrementally, not just in world revolution—which is a good idea, but quite far away. Small steps and clear, concrete alternatives, something along the lines of what the 15-M movements and the movements against privatizations have done. The Left has to be part of these movements, but to participate in a non-instrumentalist way. We need to develop a new way of common learning, and of discovering alternatives, a new way of empowering individuals against everyday humiliation, not in the manner of a vanguard, and this has to take place on a local, national, and European scale.

Last but not least, transforming neoliberalism may change the terrain for further emancipatory processes or struggles, but we must keep in mind the fact that another kind of capitalism, different from neoliberalism, is not the solution but just a step. It would not be a solution for social inequalities, climate change, racism, and sexism. For this purpose, we would have to change society more fundamentally.

Nikos Nikisianis: I too will begin with the first question, that is, what is the European Union? I suppose that what is expected of the Greek on the panel is not to present a historical or theoretical analysis, but rather to deal with this question from the perspective of the recent Greek experience.

So let's recall the major events of the last six years. In 2009, Greece entered the era of the last capitalist crisis and enacted the first capitalization of banks with public money. This transformed into a public debt crisis, leading the Greek state into de facto failure. At this point, the EU came to the rescue of the Greek bourgeoisie in a twofold way: First, it prevented the failure of the Greek state and the failure of the European private banks, providing Greece with a new huge loan in order to pay its debts; second, the EU combined this loan with an agreement—the so-called memorandum—which imposed an equally huge transfer of income from the working class to capital as well as abrupt curtailment of social and political rights in order to help capital overcome the crisis and return to positive growth.

Of course, the memorandum provoked intense social reactions and gave rise to movements, which in turn led to the rapid growth and finally the electoral victory of SYRIZA. SYRIZA won the election of January 2015, promising both an end to austerity and to keep Greece in the EU and the Eurozone. They shared the widespread conviction that a Grexit would amount to an unimaginable social disaster. In order to manage this obvious contradiction, the SYRIZA government negotiated with the

EU at length. In June, despite the continuous retreats by SYRIZA, the negotiations seemed to have reached an impasse and the possibility of a rupture was on the horizon. At this point, SYRIZA proclaimed the referendum of July 5th. During the short but intense electoral period, perhaps for the first time in the postwar history of Greece, or even Europe, two opposing class camps emerged. On one side, united behind Yes, was the entire Greek bourgeoisie: the political and financial elites, all the traditional parties, banks, corporations, the media, and even professional unions and the labor bureaucracy. On the other side, the vast majority of the lower classes, despite ideological and economic terrorism, voted No.

Nevertheless, only a few hours after the referendum, we found out that the Greek government had already decided to surrender to the EU. The only explanation provided by the SYRIZA leadership for this incredible pirouette was the good old one of TINA. "There is no alternative" outside of the Eurozone and the EU. On yet another occasion, the EU saved the Greek people from some catastrophic choices and rescued the Greek bourgeoisie from its class enemies soon after its defeat in the referendum. All of the major developments illustrate the fact that the EU and euro have been the irreplaceable stronghold of the Greek bourgeoisie. It forms a Maginot line against its class enemies, and even against its own impotence and failure.

In the last six years the EU has rescued, or at least tried to rescue, Greece from economic crisis and political crisis, from the crisis of representation, and even from a radical left government, which may be seen as the climax of the political crisis. In light of this conclusion, we can sum up the more constant effects of Greece's participation in the EU. First of all, many years before the memorandum, the fundamental European treaties, of Maastricht and Lisbon, led to the liberalization of the Greek economy, the dislocation of the social state, and the curtailment of labor rights, providing crucial support to the Greek bourgeoisie in a period when they lacked political power and credibility. Even more importantly, the EU has played a role in the restructuring of Greece's production base. The common European industrial policy continues to advance deindustrialization. The common agricultural policy—despite, or better, with the help of subsidies—led to the downgrading of agricultural production, and the abandonment of small-scale traditional farming. In this new economic landscape, European programs became the main financial resource for the Greek economy, creating and defending an essentially unproductive structure. The same programs have worked as a Trojan horse for the dislocation and the precarization of labor, the substitution of wage labor by precarious freelancers, and the substitution of the social state for NGOs. Furthermore, these programs support the formation of a new financial and political elite strongly dependent on the EU.

So, let me conclude by trying to answer the questions posed as clearly as possible. Yes, the EU is an imperialist project of capitalist states. It has a clear hierarchy within it, one that imposes a certain division of labor, power, and wealth. The EU is also an imperialist project as it specifically intervenes in the competition between capitalist forces in order to promote the interests of specific national bourgeoisies. At the same time, the EU is a neoliberal project, as it imposes upon its members, through its fundamental treaties as well as its memoranda and programs, neoliberal policies that tend to alter the correlation of power in favor of capital and against labor.

From this point of view, we could suppose that the European left would be against the EU. We know, however, that this is not the case, at least for the majority of European left parties and social movements. This situation was quite predictable. After World War II, the signifier "Europe" arose as a nodal point of the dominant ideology not only of the dominant classes but also of the oppressed classes. In post-war Europe, the idea of a united Europe was connected with peace and democracy—of course, in competition with Soviet socialism. Later, participation in Europe was abstractly associated with hope for prosperity and social justice, which was strongly connected with the promise of social democracy. This correlation between the EU—which is an imperialist, neoliberal project imposed by the European bourgeoisie—and the widespread social hope for democracy, peace, and prosperity reflects the economic, ideological, and political hegemony of the First World bourgeoisie over labor, and especially its victory over the Communist movement after the 1970s.

It is no coincidence that Europe was finally united at the same time that this victory reached its peak, namely, just after 1989. Because of this nodal role played by Europe in the dominant ideology, it has been very difficult for the European left to reject the European project. Instead of offering a radical critique, the European left makes a distinction between Europe *in abstracto*, as a universally accepted value, and the real, existing EU with its treaties, institutions, and policies. This leads to defeat in ideological conflict. Instead of counter attacking the nodal points of the dominant ideology, the oppressed classes or the Left tend to accept and support them, claiming that the ruling class cannot or do not anymore support them honestly and effectively. From this point of view, the European left, for example SYRIZA, accuses the European leadership of not being Europeanist enough. It claims that only the Left truly represents traditional European values and can advance the project of a genuine European unification. Following this point of view, the Left is in fact obliged to support the existing EU.

We cannot easily denounce this strategy in general. It has been proven very useful and quite crucial. If the Left decided to renounce and contravene all dominant values at once, it would certainly be marginalized. Nevertheless, when the social movements recite the dominant ideology, this puts them on hostile and slippery ground. Accepting the dominant values and employing them against the dominant classes may make for a useful weapon, but it may also capture political movements for the dominant ideology. This is exactly what happened to SYRIZA. The party failed to defend Europe to the extent