

Assises POUR l'ecosocialisme



What the heck is Ecosocialism ? *Building a new left wing political synthesis*

Corinne Morel Darleux - National secretary, Parti de Gauche
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Presented by Gyula Hegyi, Corinne Morel Darleux and Sophie Rauszer

A political concept born in the 70s with thinkers such as André Gorz, ecosocialism is now booming across our continent, as the ecological, political and economic crises is revealed in the eyes of our fellow citizens as one and only one crisis. Ecosocialism is the convergence of two political movements. Firstly, socialism which developed out of the struggles of workers, though having got rid of the productivist logic and secondly, political ecology which is firmly anti-capitalist. Far from being an abstract academic theory, ecosocialism offers a practical alternative to address the ecological crisis that threatens Humanity. By defending general interest, it renews the Republican thought by offering to sovereign peoples the possibility to restore the productive system and the economy at the service of human progress and real needs.

Dear friends,

Thank you for inviting me, and thanks to the Green Summer Academy members for organising this event. I have been visiting different places in Europe and Northern Africa these last months : Tunisia, Morocco, Italy, UK, Portugal... to present this political project that links environmental issues with both the social emergency and the catastrophic austerity policies that people experience on a day-to-day basis. This makes it a very concrete political issue to be discussed, as an alternative to the liberal assaults that we can observe in all these places. Because Europe in its entirety has become a real austerity laboratory, where the people's sovereignty was hijacked and public life became de-politicised. All the more so in Greece of course, where the Greek government looks to fill its coffers by selling everything they can, brutally closing down public TV and radio channels, leaving Qatari funds to massively invest in its goldmines and its banks, opening up its ports' capital to Chinese investors, selling out even its islands, six of which have just been sold to the Emir of Qatar for a few million euros.

At home in France, unemployment has been repeatedly breaking its records for more than 21 consecutive months, the so-called Socialist government is implementing the European Fiscal Compact, dubbed "Merkozy" treaty, and grants 20 billion Euros in tax credit to corporations for competitiveness... without demanding anything in return. This government is doing three times worse than Nicolas Sarkozy did, when he cut 19 billion euros over the course of 2 austerity plans : In comparison Francois Hollande has already managed to cut down the 2013 budget by 37 billion euros. And a second plan called "competitiveness plan"

will take the total public spending cuts up to 60 billion euros by 2017 !

Until now the southern-European countries were the ones suffering the neoliberal assaults from the IMF, the WTO or the World Bank. From now on, no one can escape anymore. What the various austerity plans command is not only the reduction of public deficits : these come with repeated attacks from the European Union against public services. These public services which they consider to have an outrageously monopolistic status - in total contradiction with the sacrosanct "free and undistorted competition" agenda. This results in the privatisation of fundamental services such as energy, railways, education and healthcare, which are forced to compete. It also results in the degradation of working conditions, the abandonment of unprofitable missions, and leads to a search for the socially and environmentally lowest bidder.

This is how many Eastern European countries have become the attic of Europe for toxic waste, transnational companies taking advantage of the lack of environmental laws and norms to relocate their most polluting activities in these countries. In year 2000, Romania has encountered a terrible industrial accident, named as a second Tchernobyl, with millions of liters of river water polluted with cyanure from the golden mine of Baia Mare, owned by Australian interests. And here, in Hungary, it was in 2010 the toxics from the Ajka aluminium production site. Everywhere, everyday, decisions are made by a small oligarchy in terms of economic interests that bypass environmental and human needs.

And alas, in this context, I must say that if Margaret Thatcher is dead, her TINA (There is no alternative) is alive and well. This is why it is more important than ever that we take on two tasks : demonstrate that another way of doing politics is possible, and link this project to a network of radical, red and green, internationalist forces. When I say "radical" I don't mean an appearance of radicalism or just postures. I mean to take the word literally, and to go to the root causes : capitalism, neoliberal and productivist policies that have led us to an economic, social and environmental disaster. Einstein said : "We cannot solve our problems with the same level of thinking that created them". So let's be radical indeed and let's fight what drives the system : consumerism geared towards material accumulation -thus widening social inequalities, the productivity-oriented system which exhausts our biosphere's resources, the globalisation of the economy which allows for social and environmental dumping. Let's point to the real culprits: the financial oligarchy, and the ideologists who advocate for "free and fair" competition and trade. Because both the social crisis and the environmental emergency were caused by the all-embracing profit-seeking ideology, by an economy that seeks production for the sake of production and that forgets human needs.

In the European Left, we have done a great deal in terms of system analyses, and I won't repeat these points today. But at the Parti de Gauche, we think that breaking away with the system implies that we need to trigger popular involvement around a rallying project made of hope, good living - the « buen vivir » as our comrades say in South America - so that the anger growing in our countries doesn't tip over into hatred. Gramsci said : "The old world is dying away, and the new world struggles to come forth: now is the time of monsters". Here is what we're doing : we're fighting monsters.

And I must say that a beautiful momentum has been achieved in the last few months around this new project, to wage the cultural battle and "decolonise the imaginary", to show that the alternative exists, and that we know how to implement it. Ecosocialism offers a new synthesis in the Left, having learnt its lessons from the past and assimilated the new challenges of the present. Because we now know that human emancipation cannot be achieved without democracy, nor by never-ending growth: the biosphere does not allow it. This forces us to reconsider our production and trading system, and generally speaking the entire social and political organisation.

The actual system has interests that are contrary to environmental conservation : it aims at producing ever more, to sell ever more, in order to get ever more profit. Therefore, we get ever more pollution, predation

on natural resources, and ever more social exploitation. This is the reason why we regard ecosocialism as a hyphen between ecology and anticapitalism, between environmental struggles and Left's historical battles. Also, to be honest, decades of environmentalist talks, pitching one against the other, have done some damage. We don't recognise ourselves in that kind of ecology, the kind that blames individuals but not the capitalist mode of production. That ecology that readily relies on the so-called "sustainable development" departments of multinational corporations such as Veolia, Total or E.ON. On the contrary, the great novelty of our approach and its success is to always involve workers through the socialization of the means of production, the creation of cooperatives, and an extension of workers' rights. Just like when we organised a big meeting in Paris during the last presidential campaign in March 2012 with striking workers to share ideas around their take-over projects which included environmental planning. Because the workers are the ones who operate the machinery, who know the tools and risks, who have the skills and training, the ecological conversion won't happen without them, even less against them. Therefore we must reach a new compromise between working classes and concerns for the planet.

The Parti de Gauche therefore launched public meetings for ecosocialism throughout France, with a first national conference in Paris on the 1st of december 2012, along with our comrades from the Front de Gauche of course, our alliance with different political parties, but also along with many public figures, such as Mickael Löwy or René Ramirez, from Ecuador, and with organisations, trade unions and journals. Given this first edition's success we decided to keep it as an ongoing process, led by a national committee, and supported by many local and international initiatives. A first manifesto was subjected to debate, collectively amended, mulled over and scored, and we ended up synthesising it with Jean-Luc Melenchon, pencil in hand, to reach the "18 theses for Ecosocialism". It is now being translated into Spanish, Greek, Italian, English, German, Portuguese, Polish, Arabic and Japanese, and we will soon be able to send it to all our worldwide counterparts and friends. We are already in contact with the Ecosocialist network that appeared in Quebec, with the ecosocialist appeal of Geneva, and our manifesto was already presented and discussed in more than a dozen of different countries.

In a nutshell, to take the path of human progress, the 18 theses of this Manifesto state the necessity to establish a new economy in the service of human needs, to produce differently with long-term environmental planning, to establish the "green rule" as a political compass instead of their "austeritarian" golden rule, and to conduct the Citizen's Revolution by breaking the bonds of European treaties and by engaging in an internationalist combat.

Here is our challenge... and we are well underway !