

Assises POUR l'Écosocialisme



Let's be radical indeed !

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www.lespetitspoissonrouges.org*

Dear friends, dear comrades,

Thank you for inviting me. Thanks to the Front de Gauche members for organising this event, and of course thanks to our guests and speakers Louise Hutchins (for Greenpeace), Derek Wall and Romaine Phoenix (for Green Left).

I mean it all the more that here in London, you are at the frontline. Alas, England showed us the way... In 1979 already The Clash castigated Margaret Thatcher's "ice age", rejected symbols from the past, "the nuclear error" with the accident at Three Mile Island the year before, calling upon the youth to wake up with these words : "Come out of the cupboard, all you boys and girls"... And today 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 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. This also results in the degradation of working conditions, the abandonment of unprofitable missions, fares increase, and leads to a search for the socially and environmentally lowest bidder. We have repelled the Bolkestein directive, but the directive on Services remains ! Our public services are slowly but surely perverted into services "of general economic interest" that we can entrust private operators with. Unfortunately, a private operator in a capitalist system has no interest in defending the general interest. It has an interest in making profit. However education, health, energy or water supplies are not commodities like any other !

The neoliberal discourse has one goal only: reinforce that wealth-hoarding, all-owning oligarchy in control of the means of production, information and decision. Global corporation shareholders, leading media moguls, and political leaders can't get enough conflicts of interest and revolving doors, to the detriment of workers and citizens, all those men and women who can only sell their workforce and for whom public services are sometimes the only defence left standing between poverty and destitution. Public services must remain the property of those who own nothing, because at the end of the month it is unacceptable to have to choose between eating, keeping warm, or treating an illness. But the dominant discourse is also built precisely in a way that discourages them from fighting back and from changing the way things are. If "we can't do anything about it", because there is supposedly no better solution than the one dictated by the market, so there is room neither for politics nor social struggles, the conduct of public affairs is no longer the business of citizens, as it has been confiscated by the "experts" in economics and finance.

In short, Margaret Thatcher is dead but TINA 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 and internationalist forces on the Left. 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 cause: 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. 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 Left, we have done a great deal in terms of system analyses, and I won't repeat these points today. Our positions and our presence in struggles have proved our determination to not bow down and to be on the side of those who resist. But breaking away with the system implies that we need to trigger popular involvement around a rallying project made of hope, good living and happy days. We name it ecosocialism. Building this project is an essential political investment for the future of our Left internationally, 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.

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, that it is painted red and green, and that we know how to implement it. We know in France that such an alternative will not come from the government. Even those who wanted to believe it, now realise that our government that claims to be « socialist » and « green » is neither one nor the other. So at

a time when too many politicians don't know their left from their right, when parties and political actions face a huge crisis, the Front de Gauche stands out as the main political force bearing an alternative project. And it is urgent to show that a strong Left exists, one that hasn't resigned, one that is able to federate, around a radically different society project. Radically different, because ecosocialism offers a new synthesis in the Left, having learnt its lessons from the past and assimilated the new challenges of the present. Socialism ignored the environmental dimension of its emancipatory project and hasn't been able to foresee that the limitation of natural resources would lead us straight into a wall. As for ecology it has had too much of a tendency to forget the economic analyses of the system and to look at social struggles from a distance.

Our own ecosocialism is founded on political ecology and on the rejection of "green capitalism"; we regard it as a hyphen between social and environmental struggles, it is the union between a socialism freed from productivism and a fiercely anticapitalist ecology. And it is not a side-show to our policies. Because the very conditions of human life on Earth are at stake. Climate change, loss of biodiversity, pollution of the air, water and soils, depletion of natural resources... We must never forget that we have only one biosphere that knows no borders. We saw it with the oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico or in Fukushima : decisions made in one place on the planet have repercussions everywhere else. However capitalism and its productivism have interests that are contrary to its conservation : to produce 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. And social-democracy failed to understand this new challenge and is in a dead-end.

The Parti de Gauche therefore launched public meetings for ecosocialism throughout France, with a first conference in Paris on the 1st of december 2012, along with our comrades from the Front de Gauche of course, 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, supported by many local and international initiatives. A first manifesto was subjected to debate, and 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 presented and discussed in Tunisia, Morocco, Algeria, in Rome, Spain, and soon in Portugal, Hungary and Brussels.

In a nutshell, the 18 theses of this manifesto state the necessity to establish a new economy in the service of human progress, to produce differently, to establish the "green rule" as a compass instead of their "austeritarian" golden rule, to conduct the Citizen's Revolution by breaking the bonds of European treaties and by engaging in an internationalist combat. Our manifesto demonstrates once more that if they don't know how to, we do ! What remains to be done is to convince the majority, but we have already succeeded in transforming the old productivist Left's « concrete and electricity » face. In short, that Left which still believed in the "production – growth - consumption" circular pattern.

Today we know that the recovery of our economic growth – GDP-wise – is not only an economically unverified hypothesis, it is neither desirable nor sustainable from the point of view of our natural resources and ecosystem. We have managed to revert, in an increasing number of minds, the traditional logic of supply and demand. Because this is what anti-productivism means :

just stop reasoning in terms of products to sell on the market, where it doesn't matter what you produce, where and how you produce it. Instead start with what people, not shareholders, actually need.

We have also shown that *there is wealth*, and the measures we propose in our Manifesto can redistribute that wealth as well as fund the ecosocialist investments we need: in the first year alone, our counter-budget can generate an extra 130 billion euros. Here's enough to invest in wealth redistribution and in the abolishing of social insecurity, in an environmental planning programme and family farming, in the creation of a public sector for energy, in renewable energies, phasing-out of nuclear power, and in railway plans...

We have proven that bringing back production activities and emphasizing the ecological transition would create numerous jobs, as opposed to the disastrous economic and social "laissez-faire": the increase in the price of crude oil alone could destroy one hundred thousand jobs in the car-making industry within 5 to 10 year! So the real question is whether we let the market go on, or whether we show a sense of anticipation and political will. This is what we, the Front de Gauche, call environmental planning: a long-term planning, publicly administered and controlled by the citizens. Bringing back activities, industrial redevelopment on a social and environmental basis, conversion of our production tools and a greater redistribution of work... : an interventionist policy could generate several million jobs. A transition towards family farming would in itself create four hundred thousand jobs ; according to a study by our National Center for Scientific Research, energy transition could create six hundred and thirty thousand jobs by 2030, based on the Negawatt scenario.

This will not happen without strong links with the working world. And let's 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 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, who have the skills and training, the ecological conversion won't happen without them, even less against them.

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

To conclude we now have a project : ecosocialism, a platform : environmental planning and a strategy: the Citizen's Revolution, that is to say, everyone, everywhere, reclaiming the political life.

The alternative is becoming possible. It is within reach. Let's grab it.