

isl

6th Conference of the European Anti-Capitalist Left Athens, 9-10 June 2003

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STATEMENT

1. Resistance to the war in Iraq has inspired unprecedented mass mobilisations on a world scale. The ongoing instability of world capitalism, the international economic recession, the process of European Union state formation, and a new wave of social attacks on the working classes, youth, women, immigrants and others will lead to new mass struggles. They are fostering a general process of political clarification inside the labour and social movements and parties of the left. In the next twelve months the European ruling classes will make an all-out effort to strengthen the European Union as a supranational, imperialist state. The social democratic parties will once more play a key role in trying to 'convince' working people to accept new cuts in jobs, wages, pensions, housing, education, health care and labour rights in the name of 'competitiveness'. They will also proclaim the need to accept 'sacrifices' of democratic rights and freedoms and asylum rights, to spend more on the military and to build a European 'army'. The European Anti-Capitalist Left will be at the forefront of mobilisations against this new neo-liberal wave, and will participate in the June 2004 elections. We want to break the iron chain that links neo liberal policies to war and war that prepares a new waves of massive social aggressions – a chain that is at the heart of global capitalism.

2. The war on Iraq has been an historic event: it was the first frontal, planetary clash between global capitalism, led by the US government (and its allies), and the new international social movement. Far from being irrational or fortuitous, the new strategy of US imperialism, centred on 'unlimited war', is linked directly to the rise of capitalist globalisation and the necessity of mastering the heightened contradictions that result from it. These contradictions include: unbridled extension of the reign of the market; deregulation of economic and institutional functioning, including systematic abrogation of labour's hard-won rights; transnational concentration and mobility of financial and productive capital; a more pronounced hierarchy among capitalist states; and an unprecedented intensification of social inequality, on a planetary scale as well as in each region and country. As a result inter-imperialist contradictions, which have been exacerbated and set loose since the collapse of the USSR, need to be kept under control in new ways, since all the institutions that traditionally kept social and popular movements within bounds and channelled social explosions have lost their legitimacy and their grip. The outcome is economic volatility and general instability. The extraordinary extent of US power, whose supremacy is very uneven on different levels (military, economic, monetary, political, ideological and cultural), itself contributes to increased instability.

3. The 'surprising' opposition of the French and German governments (supported by Belgium) impeded NATO's functioning for a while and (with Russia and China's help) successfully blocked Bush and Blair's initiative in the Security Council. Their opposition was too strong, too well thought out and too concerted to be reduced to remote historical factors, accidents of party politics or personal ambition. The opposition from the EU's key sector is linked directly to a resurgence and reinforcement of contradictions within Western capitalism. Admittedly these contradictions are still held in check by transatlantic imperialist arrangements, the unrivalled supremacy of the US and the EU's difficulties in forming its supranational state. But US strategy, more and more systematically unilateralist, including in trade relations, is having a growing impact on US-European relations. During the past five years economic conflicts in the WTO framework have changed the diplomatic climate. The unprecedented growth of the 'transatlantic economy', measured in the volume of trade and above all in the level of foreign direct investment, has had contradictory effects. Intensified transatlantic integration has also stimulated intensified competition on both sides of the Atlantic and elsewhere in the world. Two political-strategic shifts are thus taking place at the same moment for the same reasons. US imperialism has been reorienting its foreign policy in the wake of the disappearance of the communist danger: a close union with Europe has become a lower priority than reaffirming its global domination. In its ongoing alliance with Europe, the US sets the ground rules on the basis of its own interests. (The war on Iraq is the most visible example.) Simultaneously the European Union's economic dynamic (the euro, consolidation of the single market, eastwards expansion) is impelling it to equip itself with the nucleus of a supranational state apparatus. Without challenging US supremacy, the EU is striving for a new equilibrium that would change the relationship of forces. This dynamic is pregnant with frictions, partial conflicts and more acute contradictions.

4. Formation of a supranational state, an indispensable tool for the European ruling classes, is running up against the direct influence of US imperialism and the heterogeneity of the EU's (main) member states. But the main obstacle is the lack of substantial legitimacy or a broad social base. In order to establish its semi-authoritarian state and withstand international (above all US) competition, the EU is dismantling the 'welfare state' and reconsecrating the Third World. This in turn increases popular resistance, particularly from the working classes and youth. Europe has become an epicentre of a global social confrontation, as shown by the huge anti-war mobilisations that have shaken several governments. Several of these governments (Britain, Spain, Italy) chose to back the war and line up behind the US; they reaped a huge wave of protest and mobilisations. Others (France, Germany, Belgium) positioned themselves 'against the war', visibly taking their distance from the US; they portrayed themselves as peaceful, democratic, social, humanist, 'internationalist' imperialists, concerned about their new world order with its institutions and rules. They had two goals: to win over world public opinion while gaining ground from the US; and to win over public opinion at home, the better to push forwards with neo-liberal policies.

5. The neo liberal policies of global capitalism has led to war; today, war is leading to a new wave of antisocial policies. At the same time 'the politics of war' is still on the agenda. The radical left rejects this capitalist, imperialist strategy. It faces three challenges.

(1) The anti-war movement has partially demobilised since the war's end. It was not able to stop the war. But its militancy, its huge demonstrations, and its impact on society have reached far beyond activist milieus. It has made it a major factor in political life, even if this has not a decisive impact on the recent elections (in Italy or Spain for instance). The situation in the Middle East is very unstable, especially in Iraq. The Israeli government continues its war against the Palestinian people and occupying its country. The US hasn't abandoned its goal to bring the whole of the Middle East under its control, threatening the Iranian and Syrian States, calling to destroy the popular resistance movements in the area. The so-called 'war on terrorism' has also led to a massive rise of racism and direct threats to the black, Muslim, Arab, Asian communities in the different European countries. Whatever the position of the EU governments has been in the Iraq war, all are united and in alliance with the US to attack the asylum and democratic rights. We cannot rule out a new threat or military intervention by the Bush administration. It is important that anti-war activity continue to take place regularly in each country and across the continent, combining antiwar and antiracist mobilisations. The massive participation of youth, in fact a new political generation occupying the forefront of the social movements, is a key element for the new cycle of struggles and the reinforcement of the class struggle.

(2) After the war, the 'social question' is now at the centre of the political battle, thanks to the governments' offensive and the bosses' offensive at the workplace level. The EU is pursuing the same policies and carrying on with the 'Lisbon agenda' by attacking directly at three points: (a) Dismantling the pension system and (partially) privatising it, transferring the huge sums now in the publicly controlled funds. This relates directly to the EU's other priority: unifying and expanding the financial market in the interests of big capital; (b) The so-called 'labour market reform', in order to deregulate rights in hiring, redundancies, working time, wages payment, social insurance, etc. This is an attempt to smash the common framework that has been crucial for working-class cohesion. Today the 'reformers' have Germany in their sights. (c) The bosses think the current relationship of forces now makes mass redundancies, drastic pay cuts, speed-up and increased exploitation of labour possible. The wage earners have accordingly responded massively with demonstrations and mobilisations, as well as some of the most powerful general strikes in decades in France, Italy, Austria, Germany, Spain and Portugal. This is a genuine 'Europeanisation' of the class struggle: virtually simultaneous struggles around the same problems, putting forward the same goals and same solutions, using the same forms of mobilisation. Now on the agenda are European struggles, organised Europe-wide coordination meetings, and European general strikes. In short, we need more than ever to form a new, active, militant European wide trade-union force – while the bureaucratic apparatuses of the national union federations and the ETUC are blocking this perspective, linked as they are to the 'Lisbon agenda', the well-known 'business summit' of the European Union (March 2000).

(3) Faced with the bourgeoisie's attempt to move forwards towards the nucleus of a supranational, imperialist EU state, the necessity of a European alternative can no longer be evaded. The European radical left has been lagging behind in its discussions and in developing its programme. While the EU is imposing its decisions – more than 60 percent of national laws implement EU decisions, the European military force is moving into action; the European Central Bank is exercising sovereign power over monetary policy; EU laws ('directives') are supplanting national legislation – parts of the new European social movement organised in the ECF, out of incomprehension, hesitancy or ignorance, is not taking on the EU institutions. With the Convention meeting, the Constitution being written and the Inter-Governmental Conference looming, we must urgently make a more systematic, more coordinated, political riposte and put forward a European anti-capitalist alternative.

6. The EU is going to use the June 2004 European elections to carry out a gigantic EU political, media and publicity operation from the North Pole to the Mediterranean and from the Atlantic to the Russian frontier. Its goal is to win over a popular base and a substantial legitimacy, which are indispensable to neutralising the recovering social and trade union movement and herding them into line behind an imperialist European power. European social democracy has already taken up its battle stations in the 'spirit of Lisbon': first strengthen European capitalism (in face of the 'American threat') and accept a new round of austerity, in order to re-launch social progress at some later date. The EU is supposed to become the alternative to the US: peaceful, social, humanist, 'international', etc. This new ideology is meant to restore a stable political anchorage to the EU state.

But the historical, existential crisis of the SP's is irreversible. This doesn't mean that they have already lost their hegemony over the labour movement: neither are temporary, purely electoral resurgences to exclude. But there will be, in the present conditions of capitalism, a genuine reconstruction of social democracy on the ideological, programmatic, political or organisational level. Besides, the process is very uneven, from one country to the next in terms of scope, depth and tempo, as it has been throughout his history. (Contrast the Labour Party with the SPD or Italian DS, or the Walloon and Flemish SPs within the same country!)

7. The EAACL will take part in social, political and electoral struggles as an independent, radical, anti-capitalist current. But we will not lose sight of two factors that constitute levers with which to expand into a much broader space. First, we have entered a period of political clarification of considerable scope and depth. The process of radicalisation during the last several years has begun to push back the social and electoral boundaries. The traditional parties may not be moving much, but their electorates are. Besides the war, social issues and the everyday life of the world of labour are provoking breaks. The militaristic and neo-liberal orientation of social democracy has led to a massive rise in consciousness. The SPs and other left-wing parties that have participated in such governments have generally paid a high price! Second, the huge mobilisations of the 'global justice' ('no global') movement and the popular upsurges against the war have been initiated, organised and oriented.

8. Led by radical (social and political) left forces, outside and often against the central bureaucratic apparatuses of the traditional workers' movement. After having tried in the beginning to discredit and criminalize the movements, they are now trying to join them in order to win influence inside. This opens the way for broad united front actions which widen the terrain and the political influence for the radical Left.

All this is a reason for the EAACL to be in the streets and in the struggles. We will also be present, everywhere, in the campaign for the 2004 European elections. Participating in this contest, is a key element for implementing the hug energy and commitment of the social movements on the political terrain, and for sharpening the political clarification towards the reformist social-liberal forces.

First, we will develop our own political identity and our own platform, which will distinguish us clearly on the basis of the experience of the last fifteen or twenty years: – struggle against imperialist war, immediate withdrawal from NATO; against an EU army and EU militarism; – against social-liberal policies and against participation in social-liberal governments; – against so-called 'anti-terrorist' policies that attack democratic and political rights (the Spanish state has outlawed a party, Herri Batasuna, which was legal and massively present in the elected bodies of the state) and criminalize struggles and movements, in particular those of immigrants and blacks; and against the EU of big capital and the utterly anti social and anti democratic (draft) Constitution.

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

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

Second, the EAACL will not be content simply to bear witness. To the extent possible in each country, we will try to form alliances or electoral blocs in order to defeat the parties of Big Capital as well as social democracy, -both linked to the neo liberal policies of global capitalism, and the other left parties that go along with them.

Third, the EAACL will wage an active, dynamic campaign with a high political profile in favour of an anti-capitalist, socialist alternative. The EAACL will publish its European 'Manifesto' at the next the 7th EAACL Conference, to be held in Paris in November 2003. The EAACL supports the initiative of a 'Convention for an alternative Europe', as proposed by the PRC (Rifondazione).

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