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On the reasons for our weakness

We need to ask ourselves the following three questions and discuss them in depth:

- Why did the neoliberal ‘revolution’ triumph and structurally weaken the left, in particular during the 1980s?
- Why, in the aftermath of the recent global financial crisis, which subsequently grew into a crisis of the euro and the EU, did the left generally remain on the defensive?
- What are the causes behind the lack of solidarity provided by the left in the EU with the elected Greek left-wing government?

These are interrelated questions, because the same institutions and people caused and profited from the corresponding processes and/or problems: ideologists, think tanks, politicians and the mighty representatives of European finance capital. The left proved incapable of effective resistance. Dedicated organising and solidarity is what was required. The left could have attempted to create momentum by developing an attractive project and offering organisational structures that appealed to people with a material and/or ideational interest in such resistance: either, because these changes would or could have structurally improved their position in society and/or because these changes would or could have enhanced justice in society. Organisational structures become attractive when they effectively combine transparency and internal democracy with a meaningful purpose, and offer members and the interested public a welcoming space. If collective agreements and campaigns match an individual’s drive and their motives for action, they can create an incentive and lead the person in question to experience the organisation as personally enriching. By convincingly promising enhanced consumption, new individual freedoms, and freedom from tax-financed paternalism, mismanagement, cronyism and low-quality public services, the neoliberal block frequently came out on top. An emphasis on greater ‘responsibilities’ and a certain degree of cuts to social spending that initially only affected the ‘unproductive’ seemed a comparatively small price. The EU and its predecessor organisations did not spark much political interest, yet thanks to greater freedom of movement, they have made everyday life, leisure time and holidays more appealing. The fact that this did (and does) not apply equally to every EU citizen, was only of interest to a politicised minority.

Since the beginnings of the EU (although the entry into force of the Maastricht treaty on November 1, 1993 founded the EU, the EU’s history actually dates back to the preparations for the European Coal and Steel Community agreed in 1951), the left has been unable to highlight a number of important facts. This includes the points that the EU was never conceived as a peace-serving project, that brutal warmongering colonial powers were among its founding members, and that the EU’s foundation was owed primarily to the considerations of Cold War NATO strategists and investment opportunities for concrete financial capital. However, these were not the institution’s exclusive *raison d’être*, and sights were also set on securing a long-term, sustainable social consensus and growing ‘cultural attractiveness’. As the left failed to make productive links to national

liberation movements, the movement against the involvement of the US in Vietnam, for peace in Europe and the world, or the feminist, democracy and environmental movements, it was also unable to combine efforts towards solidarity-based forms of society with a project aimed at developing a European Community or European Union as a solidarity-based European or global player. Only marginal efforts were made in this direction. Understandably, these efforts were radically critical of the USSR and the ‘socialist camp’ in general, and particularly of the violent suppression of the Prague Spring.

The neoliberal offensive followed the ‘aftermath’ of the 1968 upheaval (the European and global women’s and citizen rights and pro-democracy movements, the defeat of the US in Vietnam, the oil and economic crises, the end of the Bretton Woods system, and the development of new technologies, fields of accumulation for finance capital by those in power in the West). By ensuring success in global competition between corporations, financial institutions and business locations, as well as creating and demonstrating its capacity to project its power globally, the EU’s predecessor organisations became an integral part of this process.

With a left-wing European project in hand centred around solidarity-based visions of society, and that would take on the role of a European and/or global player, the left, after the downfall of the ‘socialist camp’, could have created better conditions to disentangle the close relationship between the EC and NATO and deal with the social, cultural and territorial divisions in Europe. Such efforts could have led to new forms of organisation that appealed to people searching for social alternatives. However, even after the signing of the EU treaties directed at Eastern enlargement, the left never consistently followed a left-wing project such as this. A serious start was only made in the context of the European Social Forum, a process that began after the failed French and Dutch referenda on the EU constitution. Unfortunately, however, the Charter of Principles for Another Europe¹ was more of a compromise than the result of a true political process that could have provided momentum to a left-wing European movement. Once the euro and EU crises hit, the flagging European Social Forum process broke down, precisely because of its failure to produce encouraging progress towards an alternative European project. In January 2015, therefore, there were no effective structures, and no will to create them and effectively organise solidarity.

Finally, we also need to talk about our history and experiences and use current struggles against the ruling powers to develop joint strategies to support the victims of ruling policies as much as democratic opposition. Ultimately, this could provide the basis for further action and joint political strategies.

1 <http://www.fse-esf.org/spip.php?rubrique86>