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Europe

The socialist alternative

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There is no need to exaggerate the failures of capitalism. Reality speaks for itself. The system's destructive capacity is as great as its economic, political and military power. The market economy is now sole master of the world. The planet itself is threatened. Misery is spreading. Democracy is on the defensive. The system ensures freedom to do business for a few, and a straight-jacket for the rest of us.

This disaster is not anonymous. It has faces and names. The list of top multinationals is public knowledge. The names and addresses of top directors and top shareholders are in the records. Their responsibility is clear. So is the responsibility of the politicians who, oh so democratically, manage their interests for them. The European Union (EU) is part of this system. It's modest ambition is to add a few "humanist" trappings.

The "new world order" born from the collapse of "communism" and the Gulf War promised peace, democracy and universal prosperity. The illusion only lasted a few years. But what a period! 1990-95 was a brief but decisive moment in the 20th Century. Not "midnight" in the century, but a terrible silence. Big capital's ideas machine seriously tried to convince us that we had reached "the end of history." To wipe clean the memory of the workers movement. To destroy our historical references. To uproot the very idea of an alternative society.

The zealot hack ideologists of the capitalist system sincerely believed in the New World Order and the end of history. The confusion was much more widespread. And the fog is only slowly lifting. After the disaster in Eastern Europe, many people now doubt the "feasibility" of socialism. Many still identify socialism with the Stalinist system.

Deep demoralisation

The demoralisation even affects those who never fell for the old mystification. The popularity of socialist ideas has shrunk massively, after 150 years in which socialism, precisely, gave hope and perspective to everyday struggles. That isn't the case any more. Particularly among younger people, for whom ecology, peace, aid to the third world and the marginalised of our own rich societies provide the contours of a better society, and it is the anti-racist and anti-fascist struggle which is the principle source of radical militancy.

This decline in the popularity of socialism is also due to the deep loss of credibility of the labour movement. The Mitterand years in France symbolise the incapacity of elected social democrats to respond to the aspirations of workers and young people. "Easy money" did the rest. The traditional leaderships are increasingly perceived as part of the "system" we must struggle against. They are part of the problem, rather than part of the solution. The working class doesn't, at the moment, appear to people as the generous, rising force which will deliver society from all forms of oppression and exploitation. Instead, the proletariat is rocked by transformations in the labour process. And the labour movement is on the defensive: struggling obstinately for its immediate interests, without any alternative project for society.

Revolt is vital

Workers and all the oppressed will always resist and revolt. This is a vital need, not a question of ideological

motivation. This class struggle, in the widest sense, has never halted. Today there are more, rather than less reasons to struggle against the status quo. If wage-earners, women and young people are to re-appropriate the socialist project, they will do so through new major struggles, new experiences which will shape the radical movement to come, and new kinds of organising.

This new socialism will be a combination of the fundamental aspirations of the world of work, and modern aspirations like the desire for rewarding and useful work, control over our free time, ecology, continuing education, responsible citizenship in a multi-ethnic and multi-cultural society, a new relationship between men and women, equality, justice, and a radical, active, democracy, close to the concerns of the citizen...

The new radicals

This will be mainly the struggle of a new generation, which will carry the socialist project forward with all the energy and audacity that characterises youth. Like each previous generation, they will adopt their own symbols, slogans, songs, ways of working together, and organisational structures. It will take some time to re-knit the bonds of solidarity, revitalise organisations, collectively re-imagine the world to come, and set off on the revolutionary offensive.

The future has already begun, in the current struggle to impose new social priorities. In the end, this can only be done if society itself takes control of the major levers and instruments of the economy. This means seizing them from a private sector which has totally failed to do what we need and desire. These powerful interests will resist, and Big Capital will have to be expropriated, whether we call it "nationalisation," "socialisation," or "putting into public service."

This is not an end in itself, but an indispensable means of ensuring true efficiency. A means of proceeding to the complete renovation of the state, in the direction of active, daily democracy, in the workplace and in the places where people live. For the first time in history, people's votes will have immediate practical effects. A system in which all social relationships can evolve towards more equality, more conviviality, more humanity, and more happiness for everyone.