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An antibushist future for Europe: DEMORADICAL VS DEMOLIBERAL REGULATION . . . 1



# An antibushist future for Europe: DEMORADICAL VS DEMOLIBERAL REGULATION

By Alex Foti

The answer to the party form conundrum seemed, for a while, to lie in the network. Now it looks like the network is being shoe-horned back into the party form. Here Alex Foti, former organiser of the ChainWorkers, advocates a pink, green and wobbly extension of the mayday network into a card-carrying transeuropean syndicate whose methods are majoritarian and vote-based and whose target is the production of a radical constitution for the EU formulated from below. Seems like the idea of a socialist supra-national state has never been so popular.

Premise: the mayday equation of social stratification

fordism: postfordism = industrialism: informationalism = = blue/white/pink collars:  
service/creative/knowledge workers = =(working class + middle class): (precarious + propertied classes)

Geopolitics and international regulation in the middle 00s

Never a decline of the west has been more apparent. The US and its European major ally, the UK, supported by minor bushist partners such as Berlusconi's Italy and Aznar's Spain, have been inflicting barbarism and worsened ethnic strife to the point of civil war in Irak and elsewhere. The continuous, structural human rights violations inflicted by the US and its allies, from kidnappings and secret prisons in Europe, down to Guantanamo, Abu Ghraib and Haditha, are a crying shame for all enlightened westerners: progressives have failed at stopping the totalitarian forces – namely the salafi brand of sunni fundamentalism, the neoconservative interpretation of evangelical protestantism, and shia integralism supported by the islamic republic of Iran – that are plunging the world in a clash of civilizations, where reactionary and defensive identities prevail over transnational movements and global issues of environmental balance and social justice.

Of course, the early XXI-century twilight of American neoliberal hegemony and its European ramifications, as framed by the monetarist and pro-corporate philosophy of the EU single currency and market, is not without geopolitical consequences. On one side, Indian and Bolivarian America have possibly dealt a lethal blow to the Monroe Doctrine of unlimited US power on the Southern Hemisphere. On the other side, China and India are rising giants beating the westerners at their own game of globalization. Liberalization of world markets was set in motion in 1971-1973, when the end of international Keynesism was officially proclaimed, and incipient energy crises and financial deregulations started undermining Fordism and the progressive forces that had developed under its wings. The 1980s and 1990s opened the gates to a new, more turbulent world, the world of neoliberal regulation. This was an explicit conservative counteroffensive against the unintended social (and anti-imperialist) effects of postkeynesian regulation, reasserting the right to manage and the economic privileges of financial elites in the new digital, networked, flexible, postindustrial economy. The world of high profits, high rents and low wages, of massive labor market and financial deregulations, of large-scale privatization of public assets, outsourcing and offshoring of manufacturing and services, and widespread tightening of social spending. My contention is that neoliberal regulation is now over: the 1999-2003 international cycle of struggle, 9/11 and 7-7, the bushist rise to power and the invasions of Afghanistan and Irak, repeated financial instability and environmental disaster, have all undermined the political bases of the Washington Consensus that constituted the essence of western policy and geopolitical projection in the

1980s and 1990s. Globalization is yielding to global regionalism, neoliberal multiculturalism is leaving the place to bushist occidentalism, free trade is becoming managed protectionism, while the professed multilateral internationalism of the Clinton era has turned into a one-sided and naked (but failed) attempt to unrivalled world hegemony.

#### The European bifurcation

The European Peninsula has been shaken like never before by the age of high neoliberalism. The Fall of the Wall, the implosion of Soviet imposed state communism, the resurgence of American militarism in the Middle East, have all reshaped the politics of the Continent like anything that had been seen since Versailles, or possibly even Westphalia. Today, after the French-Dutch no, Europe is larger and weaker than it's ever been. Pro-market forces of Anglo-American inspiration did push for EU enlargement in 2004. But welfare cuts and workfare reforms had already soured public opinion against the EU and its main institutions, Council, Commission, Bank, Parliament (in order of decreasing importance), so by the time the Constitution – which was supposed to provide a new internal and external governance for the Union of 25 members, grant fundamental European rights of citizenship, but also freeze the neoliberal status quo in Europe for ever – was put to vote in France and Holland, it was resoundingly rejected. To the first serious, possibly crippling, crisis of the European project, as developed over half a century by its Christian-Democrat founders, Social-Democrat adepts, and Liberal-Democrat deregulators, institutional responses have been startlingly ineffective. Basically the whole thing will be kept frozen until 2007, when the French presidential elections will have completed the present European political realignment in Old Europe, started with Zapatero in Spain, then Merkel in Germany, now Prodi in Italy. In the meantime major social upheavals have shaken France and Denmark, while social protest against welfare contraction and labor precarization has been on the increase in every major country of the old Union of 15 countries.

Most Old European élites want to stick to EU enlargement, but put the UK and most of Eastern Europe at the margins of the more political, as opposed to the economic, component of European integration. Political integration would instead proceed in so-called Core Europe, basically something like a political Eurozone, give or take a few countries, governed through a federation or confederation of nation-states with unified fiscal, monetary, social policies, and a common foreign policy.

Europe is today facing a fundamental bifurcation for the future of its political economy. The crisis of the neoliberal agenda, unpopular in Europe everywhere, is evident also to European élites. They have responded by tracing what I call a DEMOLIBERAL regulation. Basically it's neoliberalism lite: it is a bit less pro-American, because US-EU interests are no longer coinciding in geoeconomic and geopolitical terms (for instance, Europeans have only to lose from clashing head-front with Islam) but retains a strong commitment to NATO; it invests a little more in public infrastructure and possibly spends on welfare to cushion workers from the vagaries of the labor market, but only as long as people remain under the control of workfare provisions aiming at increasing the productivity of so-called human capital and guarantee social obedience among welfare recipients. This top-down project, to which social movements and radical subjectivities must respond with a grassroots mobilization to shape political Europe as they see fit, has one only, but crucial, merit. It would constitute antibushist counterbalancing for Europe, and would put Atlantic relations on a more equal footing, should bushism be electorally defeated. And muted European neoliberalism could be still preferable to returning to the nation-state with its nationalist and militarist pretensions. Demoliberal regulation not only seeks a new business-friendly social consensus, it opposes the dangerous xenophobic forces that have become a major factor in European politics.

A political answer to European moderates which would take an explicitly multiethnic, egalitarian and ecological road is what I call DEMORADICAL regulation, i.e. a dramatic change in socioeconomic policy thanks to a progressive social bargain imposed from the bottom up (rather than top-down, as in

demoliberal regulation) through labor protest, social conflict, participatory democracy. A progressive front that would link leftist/democratic organizations, unions, movements in their common opposition to technocrats, corporations, financial markets and the liberal regulation these would like to re-assert, in order to protect the unequal economic status quo they have gained so much from. But most of all, demoradicalism would be a clarion call to all emancipatory forces in Europe to mobilize against populist xenophobia, anti-immigration hysteria, clerical interference.

Movements, with their faith in street-based and conflict-based democracy, are obvious candidates to be prime actors of demoradical regulation. Unfortunately, the most effective movements have developed in Europe at the nation-state level (look at the French mass mobilization against juvenile precarity), that is, in the national space of politics with its peculiar political traditions and identities. For all the efforts of the Mayday Network or the European Social Forum, both the traditional marxist and/or anarchist left as well as post-Seattle heretic left are deeply hostile to Europe, in whatever political incarnation, past, present or future. Communist parties, now united in the European Left, had traditionally seen the European Community as a bastion of American dominance on the Continent. Anarchists of all sorts repudiate all forms of institutional power with supranational organizations being prime targets for protest and direct confrontation (the more remote, the worse they are). Trotskyites, still blooming in spite of (or maybe because of) their rigid orthodoxy, are committed internationalists, rejecting political Europe and supporting whoever they consider to be an anti-imperialist government (such as Chavez's Venezuela).

On the other hand, Syndicalists, Feminists, Environmentalists, Queers, Precarious have yet to develop a coherent European discourse capable of rendering obsolete more traditional political references on the left. At the institutional level, Greens have almost invariably kept a pro-federal, pro-secular Europe position, but this has been decisively defeated in the French and Dutch referenda. They have contributed to their ineffectiveness by being too friendly with business interests and liberal élites, too much caught into their environmental PR stunts – something they share with green transnational NGOs – to worry about mounting social inequality, so they have often lost ground to neo-old-left parties such as Die Linke in Germany.

Demoradicalism: neither party nor union, but it takes two to tango

How should a radical European discourse look like? In three words, it should be green, wobbly, pink, in order to be effective. It should lay out a cogent ecological program to reform society, a creative wobbly strategy to organize and unionize the weak and the excluded, a pink emphasis on non-violent action and gender equality, so to project a queer outlook on the world. It would have to speak to the young, women, immigrants. It would have to address the grievances of the service class, and put to good use the networking talents of the creative class. It would be transnationalist in orientation and multiethnic in composition, for a truly mongrel and mulatto Europe. It would be defiant with (but tolerant of) all forms of organized religion. It would be an obvious antagonist of the securitarian state favored by bushist tendencies. And it would challenge and confront without timidity, but also with cold-mindedness, either fascist, nationalist, xenophobic forces that are resurfacing in many corners of Europe.

But if these are widespread aspirations, antiprecarity/noborder movements lack a strong political identity to reroute the existing European left (with small "l") and provide fresh radical political perspectives to Europe's dissenting youth, precarized by fat corporations, regulated by ineffective technocracies, and burdened by the Continent's rentier gerontocracy that has plunged economy and society in an acute condition of Euroclerosis. More to point, the mayday network lacks a strong strategy to talk to the flexibilized and the unorganized. The post-cold war generation of the Left shall overcome the twin stale institutions of the XX century's left: union and party. But can you down two

old pigeons with one stone? I mean, can a networked movement be an effective substitute for both the two traditional labor and political functions? I think not. We need a substitute for a political party, in order to produce new political identity and ideological discourse, which are at the moment sorely lacking amid mounting intellectual confusion and political sectarianism. And we need a complement for the most militant and innovative sections of labor unionism, so that we can work and organize conflicts together while advancing the specific demands of Europe's precarious generation.

Let me start from the second task. Over the last two years, the mayday network has progressed sufficiently to discuss the founding of a Paneuropean organization federating all media, labor, social activists against precarity that are now working together in the mayday network. On MAYDAY 006, one single, huge yell was heard from Berlin to Los Angeles: "No borders! Stop persecution! Halt discrimination! Fuck precarity! Beat inequality!" It is to me self-evident that MONDO MAYDAY cannot wait any longer. Over the next year, the European mayday will have to network more deeply with sisters and comrades in Montreal, Toronto, Vancouver, New York, Chicago, San Francisco, Los Angeles, Tokyo, Hong Kong, Caracas, Buenos Aires, Sao Paulo, you name it.

But if you go mondo on mayday, it does not mean that it is any less urgent building a cross-european organization defending the rights of the service class and attacking the privileges of the corporate class. The mayday network has to found a wobbly-like european organization federating all the exploited, recruiting from all gender/ethnic groups and organizing all net/temp/flex workers in one big SYNDICATE OF PRECARIOUS EUROPE. It would be a card-carrying organization with its own funds and subsidized agitators, but a very flat structure, with regional nodes and cross-national hubs. It would have an explicitly formalized internal democracy, which would appoint (and remove) people in executive functions. Yes, members would have to vote on important issues and strategic decisions, with regular online and face2face consultations. I believe global movements won't progress until they adopt the democratic criteria of public discussion and majority voting. If you say liberal democracy is a fraud, you have to show a radical democracy can actually function. The first transeuropean syndicate would be open to all jobs ranging from cleaners and programmers, to documented and undocumented people, to the flexibly employed and the permanently unemployed, to anybody believing that the best form of social solidarity is supporting labor conflict and opposing the interests of employers and the investing class. It would be unashamedly syndicalist and anticapitalist in its orientation, by supporting and organizing pickets, blockades, and wildcat strikes. The recent huge social rebellions in France and Denmark against precarity and workfare should remind the mayday network that the time to establish a networked organization is now.

The syndicate would be open to all types of radical identities provided they agree on the principle of active non-violence. The syndicate would only endorse non-violent direct action, the kind, for example, that Clown Army (participate in their July 14 revolutionary parade in Paris!) and many pink collectives regularly practice across Europe. Like internal democracy, this principle is crucial for political effectiveness. Today, a time of pitiless war and subjugation of the weak, violent protests either are byproducts of wider non-violent movements or political dead-ends making state repression and media manipulation easier. Violence against property can sometimes be understood, although it tends too to boomerang against radical movements. But violence against people, if it does not occur in response to immediate physical aggression, is not only morally untenable: it is one-way ticket to political suicide.

On the party front, the issue of producing a recognizable radical political identity embodying a sense of historical urgency is a lot more complex and still immature at the moment. But it cannot wait any longer being discussed. As far as I am concerned, I see the need for reaping a distinctive political fruit out of the Seattle-Genova tree. My reasoning is this. If the radical left of 1968 and hippyism gave rise to modern political environmentalism, then the 1999-2003 ebullience should similarly produce a

brand-new political label in the longer term. Greens were born out the turmoil of the 60s and 70s. And what new political constellation will soon appear on the sky, following the travails of the early XXI century? The PINK CONSPIRACY. In a larger context, women's emancipation and the end of the patriarchal family with its unequal gender roles, feminist movements, gay mobilizations, queer politics, full civil rights for GLBTs, the assertion of reproductive rights against papist reaction, and equality of access to political representation for women represent an epochal earthquake for western politics. In a movement context, the pink carnival of rebellion was the major innovative form of political expression emerging from the Prague-Goteborg-Genoa cauldron, next to, but separate from, the white overalls and black blocs, the two other distinctive youth expressions of the anti-globalization movement. Pink collars are the present of social work and pink movements are the future of social progress. Let's do a pink alliance of heretic dissenters in Europe! Who knows? It could be the answer to the generalized disaffection with existing political parties and the institutional representation they're supposed to carry out. In Copenhagen's municipal elections, a pink list got almost 10 per cent of the votes. As early political test, it sure is promising. Barroso and Trichet are in bad need of a pink slip: they must be fired and their policies overhauled in the face of widespread social opposition and unrest.

links:

<http://www.weareeverywhere.org>

<http://www.uhc-collective.org.uk/toolbox.htm>

<http://www.eco-action.org/dod>

<http://www.noborder.org>

<http://www.makeworlds.org>

<http://www.ainfos.ca>

<http://slash.autonomeia.org>

<http://www.geocities.com/CapitolHill/Lobby/3909/index/links.html>

<http://www.reclaimthestreets.net>