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The European Union

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1. The Fourth International and its European sections have a clear general approach towards the European Union (EU) and European integration. Far from responding to the social and international aspirations of workers, women, youth and oppressed nationalities, the EU reflects on a regional level the globalization of the world economy. It is an instrument of the strongest sectors of big capital for inter-imperialist competition and for an all-out struggle against the European working class and the Third World. In current conditions, the EU means the dismantling of the Welfare State, the building of an imperialist fortress and progress towards a supra-national strong state.

This Europe is not our Europe. We fight it not in the name of national solutions and the defence of the national (bourgeois) state, which is a reactionary utopia, but in the name of a Europe which is ecological, democratic, egalitarian and based on peace and solidarity. Our struggle against the EU is part of the anti-capitalist struggle for another society - a socialist society. This will be a Europe of the working class and of the free association of peoples, open to the East and in solidarity with the South. Such an alternative will not come about through existing state institutions - either national or European. It implies mass activity of the working masses and a major crisis of the EU itself. It therefore requires building and strengthening working-class and social movements on a pan-European level. And it demands a radical break with the dominant social democratic trend in the labour and trade-union movement, whose pro-EU-stance is linked to its neo-liberal economic policy.

Without such a break and advancement of this European-wide anti-capitalist alternative, there will be no future for the struggles of workers, women and youth who - whatever their nationality - are mobilising against injustice and rebelling against unemployment and misery, racism and war. The Fourth International and its organisations want to contribute to building this alternative, in the way best suited to each country.

2. The evolution of the EU remains very contradictory. On the one hand, the project of the European Union is moving forward. It corresponds to the globalization and regional centralisation of the world economy: new countries are joining; the Schengen agreement is being put into practice; the single market is advancing; the member states are working hard to meet the convergence criteria in the Maastricht treaty and there is no single member state (not even the UK) bourgeoisie that calls for abandoning the EMU; various bilateral agreements on concrete topics are being concluded between EU members; the EU is functioning as a strong pole of attraction for European countries outside the EU.

All in all there is a steady, sometimes hidden, progress towards a European federal state, but there are many problems and contradictions. The attempt to create a political union, with elements of a supra-national state, among the key EU countries (Germany, France, Britain, Italy), centred around a common currency, is meeting with big difficulties. There is no existing European nation, and the EU lacks democratic and social legitimacy. Also, there is no cohesive European capitalist class as a social force: the concentration of big capital in Europe goes far beyond European borders, linking up directly with competitors in Japan and the USA. And there is a major intrinsic difficulty in transferring important parts of sovereignty of the national imperialist states towards a supra-national imperialist state apparatus.

Ever since the September 1992 crisis of the EU (crisis of the EMS; Pyrrhic victory in the French referendum after real defeat in the Danish one; the first big workers' struggles in some countries against the social policies implemented in the name of Maastricht), doubts have arisen in important parts of society, about the feasibility and desirability of the EU (the No vote in Norway; the narrow majorities in Finland and Sweden; rising denunciation of the social impact of the Maastricht criteria in the EU's core). The virtual collapse of the EMS in 1993 reconfirmed this.

The decisive leap forward to a common currency and a central European Bank is still before us. With only Luxembourg meeting all the Maastricht Treaty's convergence criteria, the common currency will not be introduced in 1997, not even by a "hard" core of the EU. For the next deadline, 1999, there are more doubts expressed and manoeuvres underway. In the meantime, plans to launch the ECU in (part of) the EU before the end of the century are still very much alive. This means that Maastricht-type policies will continue and that in any case we are in for a new battle around dismantling of social gains. Decisions about that will be at the heart of the 1996 Intergovernmental Conference, which will have a longer agenda than just the application and adaptation of the Maastricht criteria: a further reduction of national democratic institutions' powers in the EU, with the establishment of European quasi-state structures capable of controlling the more and more numerous and diverse mix of EU states. In addition, there will be attempts to strengthen the common foreign policy, European military cooperation and the common anti-refugee policy.

3. The EU's creeping crisis in its core countries is an important lever for a struggle against it. By linking up with these forces and strengthening social struggles that objectively make realising the Maastricht criteria more difficult, we can build and strengthen movements and campaigns for a left No and help make enforcement of the EU's projects more difficult.

Our aim is to defeat the EU from an anti-capitalist standpoint, on the basis of an internationalist solution of the current crisis, as a result of the struggle of the European working classes. This perspective is sharply opposed to the social-democratic "Europeanist" adaptation to the EU institutions, as well as to nationalist currents inside the right-wing bourgeois and petty-bourgeois parties and inside parts of the labour movement.

To advance in that direction we have to take three objective facts into account:

– the real social and political dynamic of the class struggle remains for the next period basically on a national level, in the absence of an active European-wide labour movement, of social struggles organized on a European scale, of generalised unifying demands with a European-wide audience and given the real stage of European integration today;

– the real solution of the economic, social and cultural problems of the exploited classes and oppressed masses is impossible on a national level and requires worldwide and continent-wide solutions;

– the concrete struggle against the EU and possible breakthroughs will be determined at first by national conditions in each country. Among these conditions are objective factors (such as the geo-economic and geopolitical situation of each national capitalist country), as well as the average level of internationalist consciousness among working people. It implies among other things that each country has its own mixture of social, democratic and national demands opposing the construction of the EU. Since we are convinced of the unstable situation and nature of the EU project, our task is not limited to making propaganda against the EU and in favour of European-wide immediate demands. We have to start from the EU's creeping crisis and the social mobilisations in different countries, to open the perspective of defeating the EU in practice, and to find transitional solutions, anti-capitalist and internationalist. As an international we recognize the need for each of our national organizations to have a specific tactic to orient the national class struggle against the EU, as well as the need for each national organization to participate in a European-wide strategy, based on the same overall program and the same concrete political alternative for the EU.

4. There can be no doubt that any attempt to break in one country with the reigning liberal-monetarist policies would quickly run up against the EU, which is the central organiser of these policies on a European level. Taking its position to its logical conclusion, social democracy closed off any possible way out for the working class by imposing the following dilemma: a break with neo-liberalism means leaving the EU (with all the presumed negative effects). The only possible choice was to accept the EU, in the hope of improving its institutions and policies.

The development of a strategic response that can meet this challenge is vital for getting out of the situation of political impotence that currently paralyses the working class and social movements, particularly their left wing. No doubt, the absence of such an alternative will not prevent struggles from breaking out, but they will be left without an overall political perspective - lacking dynamism, unity and the will to win. This has become a practical question insofar as the EU is going through a very difficult period from which it will not emerge very soon. Moreover, all big social mobilisations in the future will put the problem on the agenda. This is very important: without a major revival of activity by the working class and its allies, without the beginnings of favourable changes in the relationship of forces on the ground, any alternative plan will be a purely abstract construct.

If the government of an EU country is caught in the grip of a wide-ranging social struggle (comparable to those that have broken out these last few years in Greece, Italy, the Spanish state, Belgium and France) and must retreat on an important point of its austerity agenda, it will inevitably come into conflict with the institutional regulations and main policies of the EU. The matter will then fall into the tangled web of the EU's institutional framework. From this point onwards, the need arises for a left-wing alternative that breaks with the EU's institutions and member governments and that takes up social demands that workers struggling in one country can bring to the attention of the entire EU workforce.

Where would the opening of such a political breach lead? That would depend on a number of factors that cannot be predicted today. On the tactical level, three conclusions seem clear. First, to rely on the change in the relationship of forces through the activity of "those from below" means taking the social dynamic on the national level as the starting point. Second, we must understand how the political dialectic goes from the national to the European level. Finally, we must consider the opening of a crisis inside the EU institutions as being an obligatory part of the journey towards a social Europe - on condition that this involves a break-up of EU institutions and not their continuity.

Depending on the situation, country, themes, dynamics of confrontations and state of the movements, two different answers can flow from this approach:

– In some cases, for instance in the less integrated or relatively new EU member states, the national and international effects on the relationship of forces of a fight with the EU can be maximized by campaigning for withdrawal from the EU, as a first step to radically weaken the EU project. But at all times we maintain a clear, internationalist, European-wide perspective.

– In other cases, mainly in the EU's core-countries, where economic integration is much more advanced and a strong "integration" consciousness exists, it will be necessary to struggle for an immediate program of measures favourable to workers, women, youth and immigrants, and to make proposals on this basis to the other peoples of Europe in order to outflank the EU and start building a different Europe. We should make clear our propaganda that this cannot come about simply through a reform of existing institutions.

It is clear that what is key in both options is broadening and strengthening social mobilisations throughout Europe. The political axis of the propaganda, the concrete social and economic policies and the manoeuvres and negotiations, is to propose the re-organisation of Europe on other bases: as a continental European space unified on the basis of a model of growth based on social needs, full employment, respect for the environment and international cooperation. A Europe of free association between states and peoples, cooperating for specific solutions and purposes. Obviously, this will require - in one way or another - the building of alternative political institutions in the interest of working people.

5. As experience has shown, popular opposition is based on different motivations. Primarily it reflects a democratic sentiment and a more or less conscious understanding of the anti-social goal of this EU project. It is obvious that the new EU quasi-state in the making lacks democratic legitimacy. We share the "democratic" criticism of the EU with

many others, but we are not falling back on idealizing national parliamentarism.

We connect the lack of democracy in the EU with the anti-social content of EU's policies and with the lack of democracy on a national level in the EU states, and promote an social, ecological, feminist, internationalist alternative based on real democracy and self-organization. This implies, among others.

A social Europe

- An immediate reduction of the length of the working week to 35 hours without a cut in pay, as a first step towards the 32 and 30-hour work week; this would be accompanied by a thoroughgoing re-organisation of work and life in society;
- Equal pay for equal work for women; against a reactionary family policy and for the establishment of individual and equal rights in the area of social security; for the development on a broad scale of quality child care and other such facilities; for a women's right to control her fertility;
- For upward harmonisation of social security systems, of norms of safety and hygiene, and of working conditions generally;
- For youth: the right to free studies and guaranteed employment without discrimination;
- A guaranteed minimum wage and a minimum unemployment insurance payment in all countries of the Union;
- Legally recognized trade-union rights in all countries of the Union: the right to strike, right to workplace representation, right to conclude collective work agreements, and setting up of European workplace committees in the multinationals.
- To counter obstruction from speculators and veto's against social policies from financial markets, financial flows and institutions have to be controlled and socialized, Central Banks have to be put under public control and the pro-cyclical monetary straight jacket of the Maastricht treaty has to be destroyed;
- Against fundamentalism, for secularism.

An ecological Europe

- For an upward harmonisation of environmental norms and a high level of consumer protection;
- For a policy based on development of renewable energy; against nuclear energy and for the dismantling of all existing nuclear power plants;
- Against the logic of more private cars and more roads: a policy of public transport, telecommunications and energy. They should be affordable, outside the logic of the market, deliberately oriented towards user needs, and respectful

of the environment;

– For a break with the dynamics imposed by the agro-industry and chemical industry, to get an agricultural policy that assures employment and that discourages the massive use of pesticides, herbicides and chemical fertilisers.

A Europe of citizens

– Against all forms of ethnic cleansing, racism and xenophobia;

– Equal rights for immigrants from outside the EU, including the right to vote and to stand in all elections;

– Right to asylum, against the discriminating visa-policy, against fortress Europe, abolition of the Schengen treaty;

– Freedom of movement within the EU;

– Equality of social and civil rights for women; equal representation of men and women in all elected state institutions;

– Democratic right to cultural, religious, national, political and ideological expression;

– For recognition of the right to self-determination of peoples and the democratic rights of national and ethnic minorities;

A Europe of solidarity

– Against the ethnic division of Bosnia, which is favoured by the EU. Humanitarian aid, not bombs;

– Unconditional cancellation of the debt of the countries of the South and the East, to stop the mad race towards “structural adjustment”, and a break from the market logic imposed by the IMF and World Bank;

– Bilateral trade and development cooperation to respond on a priority basis to the social needs of populations, in favour of development based on the best local conditions, and by working against the law of profit by opposing unfettered competition between countries of the South for access to the world market.

A Europe of peace

– Elimination of nuclear weapons and nuclear military units, as well as of all military units at the forefront of repression, hostage-taking, terror and torture (e.g.. rapid deployment forces, para-commandos, etc.);

– A radical reduction of the military budget;

– Against a European army, for dissolution of the Franco-German brigade , the WEU (West European Union), and NATO;

– Withdrawal of US troops and dismantling of US bases; withdrawal of the fleet of US warships from the Mediterranean, North Sea and Baltic Sea.

6. The inter-governmental conference in 1996 will be the main focus in Europe in the coming period, for which preparations and debates are already underway in all countries. Any new treaty or change in the existing treaties that comes out of the 1996 summit should be put to a vote in referenda in all EU countries.

Many old and new questions will be taken up in the these preparatory discussions and negotiations:

– We oppose from an internationalist position the neo-liberal measures and the authoritarian policies imposed by the EU on the Eastern European countries negotiating their adhesion, and support and dialogue with the forces in those countries that oppose joining the EU from a left perspective or that develop a socialist alternative to the Maastricht type of European unification;

– We stay opposed to the Schengen agreement and are in favour of an open, humanitarian policy towards people fleeing to Europe from oppression and famine;

– We oppose the military build-up in Europe, the transformation of the West European Union into the European wing of NATO and the establishment of international deployment forces and are in favour of overall de-militarisation.

– We are opposed to the third phase of the Maastricht treaty, because of the uncontrollable very mighty independent European Central Bank and the anti-social policies that are needed to meet the convergence criteria for the common currency, and because the introduction of one single currency has a consequence that the space and means for different social and economic choices on a national level will be reduced dramatically;

– We are against the extension of power of European executive instances and in favour of dismantling the almighty Council of Ministers and the uncontrollable Commission. Contrary to the illusions championed by Social Democracy and others, it is not possible to democratize the EU.

The 1996 conference must in any case be challenged by a huge opposition to the EU's policies. We will work for a pan-European demonstration against EU policies, against the inter-governmental conference and for a different Europe. At the same time, we want to use the occasion of this conference to strengthen the debates in the left and social movements about concrete alternatives to the Europe of the bosses, social insecurity, unemployment, decreasing democracy and ecological destruction. We will fight for a break with the neo-liberal policies of the EU and for a social Europe, with at its heart a radical struggle against unemployment. We want to take these initiatives with other left forces and will therefore involve ourselves in the preparation of an international left conference. For the European elections for the European parliament in 1999 we present lists in as many countries as possible, taking into account the concrete conditions of the sections of the International in each country. We will publish a manifesto that presents the common line of the sections in Europe.