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Greece

"A country being bled white and destroyed by those who claim to save it"

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This contribution in the opening session of the London Conference "Europe against Austerity", organized by the Coalition of Resistance on October 1st 2011, was greeted by a standing ovation.

I come from Greece, a country being bled white and destroyed by those who claim to save it, the International Monetary Fund, the European Central Bank and the European Commission. After the adoption, application and above all the failure of the four shock treatments known as the Memoranda, and the current application of the fifth, which is the toughest and most inhuman, Greece is no longer the country that we knew: now, the streets are empty after sunset, restaurants are desperately seeking clients and the stores on the deserted shopping streets fall into ruins. The reason for this transformation is given by these facts and figures: wage earners and pensioners have already lost 30%-50% and sometimes even more of their purchasing power. Which has the effect that approximately 30% of stores and 35% of fuel pumps have closed forever. That unemployment will probably hit 30% next year. That there will be 40% less hospitals and hospital beds, or that the Greek state was a few days ago unable to provide school books to its school children, who were asked to make photocopies, and so on and on. In short, that hunger, yes hunger, begins to make its appearance in the major cities while suicides are growing in a country thrown into stress and despair.

However, Greeks are not only desperate. They are also combative, they resist, and they struggle. Especially, after the appearance at the end of May 2011 of the movement of the Aganaktismeni, the Greek indignad@s, who filled the squares of hundreds of Greek cities with huge radicalized crowds with two key slogans: "we owe nothing, we sell nothing, we pay nothing." And "all of them must go".

But beware: to resist in Greece in the epoch of the barbaric austerity of the Memoranda is not easy. First, due to the repression which is terrible, systematic, and inhumane. Then, because of the importance of the issue: Greece is currently a world test case, a true global laboratory in which the capacity of resistance of peoples to structural adjustment plans is tested during the great crisis of public debt. In sum, all eyes, whether of those at the top or those at the bottom, are now turned to this small European country which has the misfortune of becoming the global guinea pig of the most cynical neoliberalism. The result is that to win the least demand practically means overthrowing the government and, neither more nor less, the revolution!

The lesson that we draw from this totally unprecedented situation is that, today more than yesterday, there is no salvation within national boundaries. Faced with the Sacred Alliance of governments and those at the top, coordination and networking of the resistances of those at the bottom is the sine qua non of any hope of success! In simpler words, in order for the Greek test not to run to the benefit of our executioners of the infamous troika, i.e. the IMF, the European Central Bank and the European Commission, we must unite our forces as quickly as possible, to form the Sacred Alliance of those at the bottom!

It was not a coincidence that the first international conference against debt and austerity measures was organized in Athens in early May 2011, by the Greek Initiative for an International Commission of Audit of Public Debt, a movement of which I am a founding member. The great success of this first International Conference had surprised us pleasantly but, in reality, it was doubly premonitory: first, because only two weeks later, the movement of the Greek indignant burst on the social and political scene with the occupation of Syntagma square in Athens. Then, because it became increasingly clear not only that the issue of public debt is was at the root of all the major issues of our time, but that the independent mobilization around the demand for an audit of the public debt was more than possible, because it met a true popular demand!

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I think that the lesson that can be drawn from the experience of the Greek Initiative for a Commission of Audit of Public Debt is no longer valid only for the Greece. It is also valid for all other countries attacked by the financial markets, the troika and capital: the audit of public debt may, at first glance, appear a thankless activity, not very attractive and reserved for specialists, but in reality it is able to inspire and mobilise large crowds on two conditions: first, that it is totally independent of the institutions and supported by citizens mobilized in their neighbourhoods, their places of work and study. And then, that it seeks clearly to identify the illegitimate part of the debt to cancel and not pay!

Five months after this first international conference in Athens against austerity measures and the debt, we can measure the ground covered: the Greek initiative is being emulated almost everywhere in Europe, south and north, in western and in eastern Europe. The task that this situation imposes on us all is clear: these movements and campaigns on the audit of public debt should soon meet and establish networks. And this so as to make their action more effective and the meet expectations of the peoples, before it's too late for everyone.

It is exactly this task that has been taken on by the CADTM, the Committee for Cancellation of the Third World Debt, of which I am also a member, and which combines its expertise - the result of twenty years of struggle alongside the poor in the South of the planet - with its presence in the field of struggles in several European countries. The theoretical and practical contribution of the CADTM in the development of the movement against the debt and austerity in Greece and other countries has been and remains very important. But I fear that in order to meet the new challenges thrown up by a situation of a veritable war to the death between rich and poor, we need much more than the CADTM, or all the other international networks that are fighting courageously against the debt and austerity. We need many more activist forces, much more programmatic development and especially much more coordination across national boundaries.

I would now like to finish with something close to my heart: autonomous organization, or rather the self-organization and the struggle of women against the debt and austerity. If women are the first victims of the current neoliberal aggression against wage earners and all of society, it is not only because they are laid off en masse and as a priority. It is mainly because a cornerstone of this aggression, namely the destruction and privatization of public services, has as a direct result that women are forced to assume within the family public utility tasks assumed until yesterday by the state. In sum, women are now called on to provide at home, in private, the services once offered by kindergartens, hospitals, hospices for the elderly, unemployment funds, psychiatric establishments, and even social security. And all absolutely free of charge! And more, all this in the ideological packaging of a forced return to home and family by a so-called "nature" of woman accepted only as the obedient slave of others! In short by a return to the most abject patriarchy, which is combined with a frontal attack against the few rights that we women retain.

My conclusion will be categorical: that is why women need to organize independently to combat debt and austerity. If they do not, there is no one who will do it in their place.

Thank you.