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NO CELEBRATIONS ON 25 MARCH

AFTER 60 YEARS OF THE EU, IT IS TIME TO TALK AGAIN ABOUT THE HISTORY OF THE UNION AND THE VENTOTENE MANIFESTO

On 25 March 1957, the representatives of the governments of Belgium, the Netherlands, Luxembourg, West Germany, France and Italy signed the treaties establishing the European Economic Community and the European Atomic Energy Community in the *Palazzo dei Conservatori*, in Rome. This represented the beginning of the official history of the European Union, a Union that is currently facing several major crises. In sharp contrast to the anniversary celebrations organised by governments, the Left are discussing history, socio-political alternatives, strategies and actions. They are searching for the causes of their current political situation, and are looking for ways out of the crisis. The following contributes to this joint search with three proposals: debate the Ventotene Manifesto; address the history of the EU; and, analyse the history of the Left beginning with a critique of both the political opportunities that have been taken up and those that have been passed over.

WE LOOK TO THE VENTOTENE MANIFESTO, NOT TO THE TREATY OF ROME

At the signing of the Treaty of Rome in 1957, West Germany's Federal Chancellor, Konrad Adenauer, stated that 'Europe could not have found a more significant framework for this conference than its most venerable city.'¹ However, he said nothing about the terrorist axis that had formed between Berlin, Rome and Tokyo, or about war and colonial policy. Instead, he declared that 'The European Community pursues only peaceful purposes'.² Moreover, he did so by citing the Treaty, which reads: 'resolved by thus pooling their resources to preserve and strengthen peace and liberty, and calling upon the other peoples of Europe who share their ideal to join in their efforts [...]'.³

By 1952, the founding members states had already set up the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC), were beneficiaries of the Marshall Plan, members of NATO, and a majority were even colonial powers. When we reiterate the view here that neither the ECSC nor the European Economic Community (EEC) were projects of peace, this should not be allowed to detract from the peace-making power exercised between its founders or between the members that joined later; in fact, it is very important that this issue be adequately acknowledged. The same can be said of the European Community and the European Union that emerged from it: the EU has brought the citizens of its member countries closer together and culturally enriched their lives.

Nevertheless, the treaty that established the EEC was aimed at developing the common market. It reads: 'The Community shall have as its task, by establishing a common

market and progressively approximating the economic policies of member states, to promote throughout the community a harmonious development of economic activities, a continuous and balanced expansion, an increase in stability, an accelerated raising of the standard of living and closer relations between the states belonging to it'.⁴ Moreover, although the treaty was not worded in a manner that made market-focused economic policy and economic development inevitable, by 1957, the EEC was still not focused on the fight against violence, hunger and social divisions, on democracy, justice and ecology, or on openness towards Europe and the world. This stands in stark contrast to the Ventotene Manifesto.

In 1941, Italian antifascists Altiero Spinelli, Ernesto Rossi and Eugenio Colorni, who had studied the idea of European federalism, were being held in appalling conditions in a prison on the island of Ventotene in the Tyrrhenian Sea. During this time, they drew up the *Ventotene Manifesto* which was printed and distributed in Rome after Colorni's wife had managed to smuggle it out of prison.⁵

The *Ventotene Manifesto* is reminiscent of the works of Rosa Luxemburg: its language reveals passion, socialist ideals, radical social analyses, emancipatory, solidarity-based internationalism, programmatic clarity, an unreserved willingness for the political struggle for power, democratic spirit and the capacity for utopia despite a seemingly hopeless situation. The Manifesto is most reminiscent of Luxemburg's *The Russian Revolution*.⁶ Luxemburg, a democratic socialist, had written *The Russian Revolution* whilst held in prison in the early autumn of 1918. Importantly, she used her

text to criticise the Bolsheviks, but she also defended them in solidarity.⁷ Her critique was directed at the Bolsheviks' contempt for and violation of democracy. Luxemburg realised how difficult it can be to remain democratic when faced with bitter persecution, particularly military persecution, but she also understood how thin the line had become among her comrades on the differences between self-defence and the suppression of democratic dissent expressed by those who think differently. However, her warnings went unheeded, and, during late Stalinism, democrats were murdered and persecuted en masse in the 'name of socialism'.

The *Ventotene Manifesto* is directed against the fascists and those who caused the Second World War, but it also directed against Stalinism. As such, the Manifesto sets out a number of deliberations on the historical developments and learning processes that occurred after the assassination of Rosa Luxemburg. Luxemburg had hoped and struggled for a situation in which people who were suffering from any form of foreign domination, but also those who were exploited or oppressed by their own country, would rise up against all forms of subjugation and, after victory, refrain from restoring the old nation states or establishing new ones. Similarly, Spinelli, Rossi, Colorni and their fellow activists had hoped and struggled for a situation in which a European, antifascist, democratic federation would shape post-war Europe. They viewed the 'ideology of national independence' and the 'absolute sovereignty of nation states',⁸ which were characterised by capitalism, but constituted differently in terms of geography, society, economics, culture, and politics, as the roots of totalitarianism and war. They stressed that once the German and Italian fascists had been overcome any 'restoration of the nation state' would mean 'the reaction would have won'. They maintained that, 'In appearance, these states might well be broadly democratic and socialist; [but] it would only be a question of time before power returned to the hands of the reactionaries. And, once national resentment had developed again, the state would express its satisfaction at its own existence through armed force.'

100 years after Luxemburg's text and more than 75 years after the publication of the *Manifesto of Ventotene*, neither the 'single federal state' nor the 'United States of Europe' have been achieved. Furthermore, 'the European revolution [which] must be socialist [...] to respond to our needs' has remained a utopia. Despite this, the Manifesto's focus on a democratic policy of real socialisation – a situation in which the social division of labour furthers the democratisation of society and the appropriation of production by the producers – remains relevant. The same has to be said of the Manifesto's commitment to vibrant, democratic socialist policies in Europe.

CRITICALLY EMBRACE THE VENTOTENE MANIFESTO

If the Left in the EU and Europe intend to critically embrace the Ventotene Manifesto and move into a position to take action, they will have to reflect together on history. In particular, the Left needs to understand when and why the chances to influence social developments in the EU and Europe have slipped away. In this regard, it could be helpful to focus on critical turning points. Such turning points mark points in time or phases in the history of the EU during which various social and political factors come together to produce results that all relevant political actors are forced to take into account.

The history of the EU can be divided into two such phases: the period characterised by the Cold War (I); and the period since the collapse of 'state socialism' (II). In addition, there are two crucial turning points during which the Left in Europe had great opportunities to significantly influence European if not world history, and to do so on the basis of left-wing ideals and in the interests of large sections of the population. The first of these turning points was caused by the political upheavals in Eastern and Central Europe in the late 1980s and early 1990s; the second occurred in 2008 with the outbreak of the global financial crisis. During these turning points, the dominant ideology and politics suffered a serious loss of legitimacy in the eyes of the people of Europe. The first loss of legitimacy was caused by the arms race, repression against democratic opposition, and persistent injustices; the second was due to the devastating effects of neoliberal restructuring. The fact that such promising opportunities were simply passed up is mainly due to the fact that the Left has let other similar chances slip out of its hands in the past and has yet to learn from these experiences.

The Left has been unprepared during these decisive political periods because of the lack of continuous and collective work on proposals for an alternative society and because of the absence of a self-reflective political style or an attractive political culture. The following provides an overview aimed at encouraging a new start to this long overdue discussion. It covers the two major periods portrayed above and outlines a number of events that have posed challenges to the Left, whether in specific countries or at a more coordinated or European level.

I WEST EUROPEAN COOPERATION UNDER US CONTROL DURING THE COLD WAR

In 1952, the implementation of the Treaty constituting the European Coal and Steel Community led to the establishment of new institutional structures. This included the Council of Ministers, and the Common Assembly, which consisted of 78 deputies elected by the national parliaments. The Assembly only had an advisory function as well as certain rights of control and to information. However, alongside the representation provided to employees that was also agreed at this time, the Assembly posed a challenge to the Left, which now had to search for new opportunities within the ECSC framework. In addition, the European Convention on Human Rights, which was signed in 1953, also provided the Left with areas on which to focus.

In 1957, in the midst of the escalating Cold War, and faced by resurgent movements for political independence in the European colonies, the ECSC member states launched the European Economic Community (EEC) and the Treaty establishing the European Atomic Energy Community (Euratom). The EEC Treaty was aimed at reducing internal trade barriers and ensuring the establishment of a common market within the course of the next 12 to 15 years; it also provided for the free movement of goods, services, people and capital. In addition, the Assembly, now at 142 members, and the ECSC's Court of Justice, were made responsible for the EEC and Euratom. These changes posed growing challenges to the Left, which now had to explore the potential associated with them and apply it, while developing a politically effective approach to the EEC.

While the conflicts of the Cold War continued, the colonial empires collapsed and the European powers were seeking

to impose neo-colonial policies, democratic protests against the dominant political structure and demands for democratisation began to strengthen. In 1967, the merger of the ECSC, the EEC and Euratom led to the establishment of the European Community (EC). During 1969 and 1970, when the EC member states reached agreement on European political cooperation, the community still lacked a focus on civil conflict management and conflict prevention. In 1972, the Club of Rome published its first report detailing the overload of global ecosystems and promoted debate about existing forms of society and possible alternatives. At this point, the Left could have appealed to the Council of Europe's European Social Charter. However, the situation changed dramatically, when, in 1973, Bretton Woods collapsed as a result of the US budgetary and financial crisis (caused by war) and the neoliberals were finally able to consolidate their influence in the US. The most powerful parties within the growing EC (which expanded in 1973 and 1981 to include Denmark, the Republic of Ireland and the United Kingdom, then Greece) all intended to follow the new neoliberal model that had been 'Made in the USA'. The first direct election to the European Parliament (EP) took place in 1979. That same year, the European Monetary System entered into force.

These changes increased the pressure on the Left to develop a common critique of the European Community and to develop socio-political alternatives on a European scale that combined individual freedom, justice, ecology and solidarity.

In 1986, Spain and Portugal joined the EU. In the same year, the EU signed the Single European Act, which finally geared the EU towards the US economic model with the aim of ensuring that the Union would become a successful global player through the development of its internal market by 1992. At this point, the Left's commitment to a different form of society meant that it could have appealed to Gorbachev's concept of the common European home. Moreover, the Brundtland Commission's *Our Common Future* could also have been a relevant focus. Instead, the 'socialist camp' proved incapable of democratic renewal and imploded.

II THE PERIOD SINCE THE END OF 'STATE SOCIALISM' IN EUROPE

The World Bank and the IMF had already tested the conditions they were imposing on Central and Eastern Europe (as a prerequisite to the provision of credit) on highly indebted developing countries – these policies had caused social and economic destruction.

In August 1990, Iraq occupied Kuwait. In January 1991, the United States responded with intervention in the Persian Gulf. Five EU members were directly involved in the alliance for the first Iraq War. In 1992, NATO began permitting military operations outside of its member states and Alliance territory. The Maastricht Treaty on European Union (TEU), which came into force in 1993, made political integration possible. Moreover, it marked a decision to complete the internal market and introduce a single currency by 1 January 1999. It also extended the rights of the European Parliament (EP) and the EP's participation in decision-making processes. It also led to the recognition of the role of European political parties, and the strengthening of the regional dimension of cooperation in the EU. However, both the amended provisions on decisions taken by qualified majority in the European Council and the aims of the Maastricht Treaty in terms of global competitiveness, the development of opportunities to act

on 'security policy' and to gain 'protection' from refugees and migrants posed new strategic challenges to the Left. During this time, neither the EU nor European NATO states had committed themselves consistently to ensuring that (the, by then, inevitable) dissolution of Yugoslavia would be able to take place peacefully. As a result, between 24 March and 10 June 1999, NATO – together with nine EU members – went to war against Yugoslavia. Ultimately, this further complicated the Left's political scope for action, despite the fact that some new opportunities had recently emerged within the official political system.

In 1999, the euro was introduced into the international monetary system. That same year, the Amsterdam Treaty entered into force, further sharpening the rules on price stability and reinforcing all aspects of 'security policy'. In spring 2000, the European Council adopted a ten-year strategy aimed at making the EU 'the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world'.⁹ The Treaty of Nice, which was signed in 2001, created the conditions for EU enlargement and introduced Common Security and Defence Policy into EU law.

The war in Afghanistan began in 2001 with the involvement of 15 EU members and 11 EU candidate countries. In March 2003, the United States and the UK, followed by 5 EU members and 10 EU candidate countries, once again fought a war against Iraq.

In May 2004, an enormous and very important phase of EU enlargement took place resulting in the accession of Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia, Czech Republic, Hungary and Cyprus, apart from Malta and Cyprus, all of which are NATO states. The next stage of EU expansion took place in 2007 with Bulgaria and Romania. Enlargement led to the development of second-class EU members with limited levels of free movement, lower agricultural subsidies, and less representation in the EU institutions. These imbalances and contradictions in the EU grew dramatically, alongside the worsening social and political problems in the EU's neighbourhood. By now, left-wing alternatives were becoming increasingly more urgent.

With the 2007 signing of the Treaty of Lisbon, the Charter of Fundamental Rights became binding in all EU countries with the exception of the UK and Poland. In addition, the European Parliament had its co-decision rights extended again, and the European Citizens' Initiative was introduced. However, the Treaty of Lisbon also enshrined the continuation of the EU's neoliberal path by making real democratisation and the renunciation of neoliberalism impossible. The intensification of this contradiction further impeded left-wing politics. The Treaty of Lisbon can be viewed as a response by the EU's institutions to the financial and economic crisis and an attempt to strengthen the EU as a neoliberal global player. The banking crisis led to a crisis of state liquidity that was followed by the 'euro crisis'. Outside of the framework provided by the EU treaties, financial institutions were established in close cooperation with the IMF in order to secure the property and assets of the powerful in the EU's 'core countries'. When it was viewed as necessary for the stability of the Economic and Monetary Union (EMU), creditors awarded funding to euro countries having difficulties repaying their debts, albeit under strict conditions. The European Fiscal Compact and the implementation of the fiscal surveillance of the 'euro members' meant that budgeting was no longer the responsibility of the member states. In addition,

existing rules on sanctions were tightened and new regulations created. In July 2015, the informal Euro Group extorted an 'agreement' from Greece aimed at demonstrating the impossibility of real policy change; it removed the fundamental rights of citizens of an EU member state and subordinated one EU member to other EU states.

In the EU's southern neighbourhood, millions of people were forced to flee due to escalating violence. The EU countries where the refugees arrived received no form of support. Instead, deals were negotiated in the EU on refugees and walls were built to keep them out. NATO increasingly began provoking Russia, which acted and reacted in an imperialistic manner. And, once Crimea had been cut off from Ukraine, a new threat of war developed in Eastern Europe.

In general, the Left in Europe has been pushed increasingly into the political defensive. This has occurred during a period characterised by protracted crises and increased risk of new crises and wars. Accordingly, it is extremely important that the Left in Europe finally develop a common political strategy.

'PLAN DEBATE'

Confronted with the shameful blackmailing of Greece, and Syriza's defeat, a neo-liberal EU, resurgent nationalist populism and, ultimately, with its own political weakness and the danger of a new 'wave' of global financial crisis, much of the Left is currently discussing an exit from economic and monetary union. Although this is highly understandable, it also begs the following questions: what part did the Left play in Syriza's defeat? Why did the Left in the EU not provide the Left in Greece with the political support it needed? How can we do justice to 'people's worries and anxieties' while still expressing solidarity with refugees and the poor? The fact that the EU's crisis management did not radically tackle the root causes of the financial crisis is essentially due to the political weakness of the Left. Small or highly indebted countries are unable to protect themselves from the global financial markets or leave the EMU. This is only possible for countries with intact banks. Moreover, a country's leaders need to be in a position to prevent the rich from depositing income and assets outside of the country. At the very least, the country needs to be able to secure its population with supplies ranging from pharmaceuticals and blood products to food and energy. Even if certain EU states are certainly in this position, the Left in these countries still needs to clarify how it can express solidarity with states that are unable to do so. Now that Germany and France (banks in these countries were speculating with Greek government bonds) have secured the assets of the rich at the expense of the Greek population, it is easy enough for people in these countries to speak of exiting the EMU; an exit of either country would certainly be feasible. However, the losses incurred through currency conversion and those of exporters would be passed from the top down and this would lead to new social hardships, new nationalism and new levels of violence. At the same time, major imports would become significantly more expensive for other EMU members who would find it even more difficult to obtain credit, and this would worsen their debt burden.

From the very beginning, the construction of the EMU has provided economic disincentives that have had dramatic consequences for national economic structures. If economically strong countries were to leave the EMU or if the EMU were to disintegrate, this would have devastating conse-

quences. Moreover, it would become even more difficult to create the conditions needed for fair, social-ecological transformation to take place in solidarity. The challenge, therefore, is to work together, analyse and discuss why the EU and, with it, the EMU, have developed in the way that they have. This involves understanding the role that the Left has played in these developments. At the same time, it is important to analyse which development scenarios, based on current problems and constellations of power, will exist in the short, medium and long-term, and to understand what the Left is striving for and to define what needs to be done now.

It may sound abstract but this approach is essential if the Left is to see joint political success. In order to encourage and empower people to begin this task, it is time to (re)turn to the Ventotene Manifesto and to Luxemburg's writings. Despite the fact that it may seem highly theoretical, this approach is strongly linked to democratic protests against dominant forms of 'crisis management', local and regional praxes of solidarity, initiatives to support refugees or the just struggles of the Kurds, peace and antifascist action, action for climate and environmental justice, and work in organisations, parliaments and administrations. These diverse strands of practice need to be joined together by the participating forces at the administrative levels and beyond national borders. Consequently, EU policy issues such as the control of Greek debt, the distribution of refugees throughout EU countries and their integration into society in solidarity, as well as poverty-resistant EU-wide minimum standards (such as appropriate environmental standards) need to become campaign issues in the EU member states. In fact, the debate about and action taken towards developing alternative societies in solidarity may be the issue that can permanently unite the diverse activities undertaken by the Left. The initiative aimed at using the European Left Party's congresses as a European Forum for the Left and to focus on specific issues could represent a productive starting point with which to overcome the challenges that remain.

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1 Speech by Chancellor Konrad Adenauer at the signing of the Treaties of Rome, Rome, 25.3.1957, (in German) available at: www.cv.ce.eu/de/obj/rede_von_konrad_adenauer_anla%C3%9Flich_der_unterzeichnung_der_romischen_vertrage_rom_25_marz_1957-de6dfd9f25-cae7-49b3-a932-023d40fc483c.html/. 2 Ibid. 3 Treaty establishing the European Economic Community, available at: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=uriserv%3Axy0023>. 4 Ibid. 5 Spinelli, Altiero/Rossi, Ernesto/Colorni, Eugenio: Manifest von Ventotene, available at: www.europarl.europa.eu/brussels/website/media/Basis/Geschichte/bis1950/Pdf/Manifest_Ventotene.pdf. 6 Luxemburg, Rosa: On the Russian Revolution, in: Werke, Vol. 4, Berlin 2000, pp. 332–362. 7 See also Brie, Michael: Rosa Luxemburgs Symphonie zur Russischen Revolution, www.rosalux.de/fileadmin/rls/uploads/pdfs/Standpunkte/Standpunkte_10-2011.pdf. 8 Spinelli/Rossi/Colorni: Ventotene Manifesto; the citations that follow can also be found there. 9 Lisbon European Council 23 and 24 March 2000, Presidency Conclusions, available at http://www.europarl.europa.eu/summits/lis1_en.htm.

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