



## **Ecosocialism as an alternative to austerity**

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Dear friends, dear comrades,

Thank you for inviting me, and thanks to the European Left members for organising this summer university.

I have been visiting different places in Europe and Northern Africa to discuss ecosocialism these last months. Tunisia, Morocco, Italy, UK... And I was struck by the fact that everywhere, ecosocialism meets an enthusiastic response, since this political project links environmental issues with both the social emergency and the catastrophic austerity policies that people experience on a day-to-day basis. This makes it a very concrete political issue to be discussed, as an alternative to the liberal assaults that we can observe in all these places.

And I mean it all the more that here in Portugal, we are at the frontline. Although the recent events in government bring hope for change. Unlike in my country, France, where this week the Minister of Ecology, Delphine Batho, was purely and simply fired out of the government just for saying loudly what everybody thinks in silence, that the new austerity budget cuts planned for 2014 were a heresy. Because cutting down ecology and agriculture budgets yet again, when a national debate on energy is supposed to lead to a law on energy transition this Autumn... This is just a total nonsense.

Europe in its entirety has become a real austerity laboratory, where the people's sovereignty was hijacked and public life became de-politicised. All the more so in Greece of course, where the Greek government looks to fill its coffers by selling everything they can, brutally closing down public TV and radio channels, leaving Qatari funds to massively invest in its goldmines and its banks, opening up its ports' capital to Chinese investors, selling out even its islands, six of which have just been sold to the Emir of Qatar for a few million euros...

At home in France, unemployment has been repeatedly breaking its records for more than 21 consecutive months, the Socialist government is implementing the European Fiscal Compact, dubbed "Merkozy" treaty, and grants 20 billion Euros in tax credit to corporations for competitiveness... without demanding anything in return.

This government is doing three times worse than Nicolas Sarkozy did, when he cut 19 billion euros over the course of 2 austerity plans : In comparison Francois Hollande has already managed to cut down the 2013 budget by 37 billion euros. And a second plan called “competitiveness plan” will take the total public spending cuts up to 60 billion euros by 2017 !

Until now the southern-European countries were the ones suffering the neoliberal assaults from the IMF, the WTO or the World Bank. From now on, no one can escape anymore. What the various austerity plans command is not only the reduction of public deficits: these come with repeated attacks from the European Union against public services. These public services, which they consider to have an outrageously monopolistic status - in total contradiction with the sacrosanct “free and undistorted competition” agenda. This results in the privatisation of fundamental services such as energy, railways, education and healthcare, which are forced to compete. This also results in the degradation of working conditions, the abandonment of unprofitable missions, fares increase, and leads to a search for the socially and environmentally lowest bidder.

Because the neoliberal discourse has one goal only: reinforce that wealth-hoarding, all-owning oligarchy in control of the means of production, information and decision. Global corporation shareholders, leading media moguls, and political leaders can't get enough conflicts of interest and revolving doors, to the detriment of workers and citizens, all those men and women who can only sell their workforce and for whom public services are sometimes the only defence left standing between poverty and destitution. Public services must remain the property of those who own nothing, because at the end of the month it is unacceptable to have to choose between eating, keeping warm, or treating an illness.

In short, Margaret Thatcher is dead but TINA is alive and well. This is why it is more important than ever that we take on two tasks: demonstrate that another way of doing politics is possible, and link this project to a network of radical and internationalist forces on the Left. When I say “radical” I don't mean an appearance of radicalism or just postures. I mean to take the word literally, and to go to the root cause: capitalism, neoliberal and productivist policies that have led us to an economic, social and environmental disaster. Einstein said : “We cannot solve our problems with the same level of thinking that created them”. So let's be radical indeed.

Both the social crisis and the environmental emergency were caused by the all-embracing profit-seeking ideology, by an economy that seeks production for the sake of production and that forgets human needs. In the European Left, we have done a great deal in terms of system analyses, and I won't repeat these points today. Our positions and our presence in struggles have proved our determination to not bow down and to be on the side of those who resist.

But breaking away with the system implies that we need to trigger popular involvement around a rallying project made of hope, good living and happy days. We name it ecosocialism. Building this project is an essential political investment for the future of our Left internationally, so that the anger growing in our countries doesn't tip over into hatred. Gramsci said : “The old world is dying away, and the new world struggles to come forth: now is the time of monsters”. Here is what we're doing : we're fighting monsters.

A beautiful momentum has been achieved in the last few months around this new project, to wage the cultural battle and “decolonise the imaginary”, to show that the alternative exists, that it is painted red and green, and that we know how to implement it.

We know in France that such an alternative will not come from the government. Even those who wanted to believe it, now realise that our government that claims to be « socialist » and « green » is neither one nor the other. So at a time when too many politicians don't know their left from their right, when parties and political actions face a huge crisis, the Front de Gauche stands out as the main political force bearing an alternative project.

And it is urgent to show that a strong Left exists, one that hasn't resigned, one that is able to federate, around a radically different society project. Radically different, because ecosocialism offers a new synthesis in the Left, having learnt its lessons from the past and assimilated the new challenges of the present. Socialism ignored the environmental dimension of its emancipatory project and hasn't been able to foresee that the limitation of natural resources would lead us straight into a wall. As for ecology it has had too much of a tendency to forget the economic analyses of the system and to look at social struggles from a distance.

Our own ecosocialism is founded on political ecology and on the rejection of "green capitalism"; we regard it as a hyphen between social and environmental struggles ; it is the union between a socialism freed from productivism and a fiercely anticapitalist ecology. And it is not a side-show to our policies. Because the very conditions of human life on Earth are at stake. Climate change, loss of biodiversity, pollution of the air, water and soils, depletion of natural resources... We must never forget that we have only one biosphere that knows no borders. We saw it with the oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico or in Fukushima : decisions made in one place on the planet have repercussions everywhere else.

However capitalism and its productivism have interests that are contrary to its conservation : to produce ever more, to sell ever more, in order to get ever more profit. Therefore, we get ever more pollution, predation on natural resources, and ever more social exploitation. And social-democracy failed to understand this new challenge and is in a dead-end.

The Parti de Gauche therefore launched public meetings for ecosocialism throughout France, with a first conference in Paris on the 1st of december 2012, along with our comrades from the Front de Gauche of course, but also along with many public figures, such as Mickael Löwy or René Ramirez, from Ecuador, and with organisations, trade unions and journals. Given this first edition's success we decided to keep it as an ongoing process, led by a national committee, supported by many local and international initiatives.

A first manifesto was subjected to debate, collectively amended, mulled over and scored, and we ended up synthesising it with Jean-Luc Melenchon, pencil in hand, to reach the "18 theses for Ecosocialism". It is now being translated into Spanish, Greek, Italian, English, German, Portuguese, Polish, Arabic and Japanese, and we will soon be able to send it to all our worldwide counterparts and friends. We are already in contact with the Ecosocialist network that appeared in Quebec, with the ecosocialist appeal of Geneva, and our manifesto was presented and discussed in Tunisia, Morocco, Algeria, in Rome, Spain, and soon in Hungary and Brussels.

In a nutshell, the 18 theses of this manifesto state the necessity to establish a new economy in the service of human progress, to produce differently, to establish the "green rule" as a compass instead of their "austeritarian" golden rule, to conduct the Citizen's Revolution by breaking the bonds of European treaties and by engaging in an internationalist combat.

Our manifesto demonstrates once more that if they don't know how to, we do !