A tale of four elections

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WHERE IS EUROPE GOING?

The crisis of citizenship & the future of Europe

Claude Gabriel

A tale of four elections

ELECTIONS took place in four of the main imperialist countries of Europe at the start of 1992; for the Länder of Schleswig-Holstein and Baden-Württemburg in Germany; cantonal and regional in France; legislative in Britain and for the Senate and Chamber in Italy. Taken together with the Belgian parliamentary elections of November 1991, they provide important insights into the broad political situation.

While caution is in order — since elections always present a barometer sensitive to that part of the electorate that is most volatile — and despite the influence of different and well rooted state and social institutions, there are clearly some broad supranational trends at work.

Four aspects of these recent ballots can be highlighted: the growing fragility of parliamentary democracy; the electoral advance of reactionary, populist and fascist movements; the deep crisis of Social Democracy and, finally, the first stirrings of a left alternative.

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ALL these aspects stem from the same source; while it is true that capitalism, with the aid of the reformist bureaucracies of the workers movement, has succeeded in managing its crisis, it is also true that it has had to pay a high price. The past fifteen years have worn down and undermined all the classic instruments of domination, marshalling and legitimation of the bourgeois order. By clever manoeuvring, whose "cleverness" is directly the result of the retreat of the workers' movement and the absence of an overall response on the latter's part, a brutal, head on confrontation has been continually postponed. Until when?

The governmental parties have slipped back, but the main opposition parties have drawn little profit from this. Despite appearances created by the electoral system, even the British case does not escape this framework. The theory that the opposition must get in when everyone is fed up with the government no longer holds.

The traditional parties are generally discredited, the strongest in particular. This is above all true for the Christian Democracy in Italy and Belgium and the Social Democracy in France, government parties for the past decade, if not since 1945. But the official opposition has also suffered. The Belgian Social Democracy has wasted its re-entry into government in 1987 after seven years in the wilderness, while the British Labour Party's attempt to end 13 years out of power ended in humiliation. The German Social Democracy, meanwhile, no longer knows how to cope, while the bourgeois parties in France have failed to profit from the spectacular collapse of support for the ruling Socialist Party. Italy, meanwhile, sees unprecedented fragmentation among the traditional parties.

The rise of spoiled ballots and abstentions, as well as the breakthrough of the ecologists and populist right show the lights on orange and moving towards red for the parliamentary regime. The debates on the electoral system reveal the concern which haunts the bourgeoisie in the face of the general disillusionment and the turbulence in the East: to achieve an authoritarian reform of the state which will guarantee stability while avoiding any provocative ideas of a fascist solution.

But this solution is not easy to attain. It is just as dangerous to deprive an important part of the electorate of their deputies by disallowing a proper proportionality between voters and their representatives — as in France and Britain — as to allow the real expression of public opinion at a time of chronic and worsening social crisis, as in Italy, where one can cast a "useful" vote and see and hear in the media parliamentarians who are not, at least yet, ready to play the sterile parliamentary game.

The debate on the principle of proportional representation (Britain), on how much proportionality to have (France) or the height of the barrier to be achieved for representation to be attained (Italy) all revolve around the same fundamental idea: that of neutralizing the subversive effects of universal suffrage and representative democracy on the functioning of the executive. The personal campaign of Italy's President Cossiga for a more authoritarian "New Republic" is a particularly explicit example of this.

The key is the strengthening of the executive's power over society. While the material and legal powers of the state have hugely increased over the past twenty years, there remains a lack of coordination. In all these countries, the debate on electoral systems is part of a broader problematic: what political instruments and what price must be paid to maintain or even recreate a threatened social and political cohesion?

Far right becomes major force in big cities

Is the vote for the far right simply a protest vote or a lasting sign of political and social discontent? The advance of populist and fascist movements everywhere except in Britain is a significant change in the political map. With national support that today hovers around 10%, these forces embody a struggle for political power in the big cities, such as Marseilles, Antwerp or Milan, where scores of 25%+ were achieved by the far right, a sign of the social and moral crisis. Now installed in the heart of the "democratic" institutions, they are a permanent factor in the balance of forces, both on the institutional level and in society.

Whatever their differences, these movements grow from the same soil: social distress, insecurity, existential anxiety and, in the absence of any more collective way out, a search for individual salvation by the most deprived. The expression of the social frustration of the marginalized and their desire to punish "those up there" combines with a yearning for order and elitism on the part of better off sections of the middle class.

While the first group adopts the immigrant as the scapegoat for all its troubles, the latter are governed by the egotistical reflexes of prosperity which they feel to be threatened. While the first quote immigration statistics, the second refer to taxes and social transfers by the state. Nationalism, sub-nationalism and localism provide some sort of ideological basis for this jumble.

Calling for "priority for our people", Le Pen in France, the Leagues in Italy and the German Republicans give effective expression to diffuse but widespread sentiments found throughout all sections of society.

Furthermore, one should not underestimate the lifeline that this sudden breakthrough may give to these Fascist-Nazi grouplets who have for a long time remained isolated in their nostalgia.

Even if they remain still at the beginning of their organization into a real party (except in France) they have now gained three advantages. Firstly, these organizations will now dispose of the material means attendant on their presence in the state institutions, going far beyond those at the disposal of the militant anti-fascist forces.

Secondly, they have won through these elections an aura of democratic legitimacy at a moment when all the established parties are severely discredited. The long-time fascist grouplets have been joined by a new generation of fascist leaders, often young and "up-to-date".

Civil war in the social catacombs

They intend to carry out a civil war in the catacombs of society under a respectable cover and employing a united front line on their "transitional demands"; on immigration, security, housing, education, social security, the struggle against corruption, the defeat of the "secret" and illegitimate political and financial power of unions and cooperatives, European unity, the rejection of American imperialism and so on.

Thus, and finally, they can act in concert with a new right wing produced by the overall toughening of bourgeois policy which is developing inside the traditional bourgeois parties in crisis.

The worrying advances of the far right should not lead us to overlook another burning issue: the electoral decline and crisis of the big Social Democratic parties. Eleven years of exclusively "Socialist" government in France have brought the Socialist Party (PS) to the edge of the abyss. Thirteen years of "Socialist" opposition in Britain, during which time the Conservative government has implemented an austerity policy of a brutality unparalleled in Europe, have led the Labour Party to a crushing electoral defeat. In both cases the Social Democratic leadership has violently confronted and discomforted its own rank-and-file in order to win the confidence of big capital: the PS to stay in government, Labour to get into it.

In both cases this has led into a strategic dead-end. The "culture of government" — in France — or the break with the trade unions — in Britain — seem as suicidal as returning to "anti-capitalist" and "class struggle" sources, however reformist

seems impossible.

One could say that the two experiences are chemically pure and thus exceptional, in countries where the electoral system favours homogeneous and long-lasting governments. But even where coalitions succeed one another in rapid succession, confusing the political picture, there is no mistaking the decline of Social Democracy. In Germany the SPD has seen a spectacular retreat. In Baden-Württemburg, the country's richest Land with 10 million inhabitants, it got its worst score since 1968 (29.4%), while the Christian Demo-

cratic Union (CDU) got 36.9%, a decline of 9.4%.

In Schleswig-Holstein the SPD slumped from 54.8% to 46.2%. In Italy the small drop of 0.6% in the score of the Italian Socialist Party (PSI) does not accurately reflect the party's political defeat. In fact in the north the party lost 25% of its electorate, accentuating its character as a southern clientelist party and putting an end to the dreams of its leader Craxi of reorganizing the political landscape around his own person.

Enormous and disagreeable shock

This is an enormous and disagreeable shock for the European Social Democracy. Towards the end of the 1980s, its leaders hoped and dreamed that history was about to call on them. The exhaustion of the disastrous neo-liberal policies of the Reagan/Thatcher era would see them summoned into the arena of partnership. Meanwhile in the East, *perestroika* was to bring about the "socially amended market economy", propelling Gorbachev into the arms of the Second International. The future was rosy, from the Atlantic to the Pacific!

However in the event Social Democracy was overwhelmed by the impossible reform of the (post-) Stalinist bureaucracy and the discrediting of "really-existing socialism". After that, the political balance sheet of the Socialist parties' response to the capitalist crisis returned to haunt them with a vengeance. Rather than attempting to fight against it, the Social Democracy had been fully implicated, in the name of the lesser evil or of the European way, whether in or out of government.

Called upon to break workers' resistance, it sowed the demoralization to which it is now itself falling victim. Over the past ten to fifteen years this balance sheet, which is more or less clearly grasped by workers, has undermined the place of the Social Democracy inside the traditional workers' movement. Furthermore, it has cut off its access to the youth. While one segment of its popular base, disgusted and bewildered, is tending to drift to the populist or extremist right, the young and the new sectors of wage workers are not, for all that, spontaneously attracted by a "modernist" Social Democracy which offers no future or hope, no global alternative or even concrete and relevant proposals.

It should also not be forgotten that, in the deep discredit that has struck it, and more than ever implicated in the cogs of capitalism, the leading circles of the European Socialist parties have developed a taste for "easy money". Besides spectacular scandals and illegal excesses (robbery, fraud and so on) day-to-day corruption has created a layer of "Socialist *arrivistes*" whose lifestyle in times of austerity for the people is found unbearable by the rank-and-file to whom it has been wont to expand on the dangers of corporatism and egotistical demands.

While there are certainly debates, contradictions, conflicts and occasionally even a "left/right" polarization inside the Social Democracy, it is also the case that a really thoroughgoing recomposition in its ranks has yet to appear. The main apparent contradiction appears to be that between the Socialist Party, increasingly in the embrace of the bourgeois state, and the trade union movement which is under more direct pressure from the working class and social movements.

The weakness of the revolutionary left in these elections is striking. It reflects, of course, the relation of class forces at the international level and between reformists and revolutionaries inside the workers' movement. But it leaves questions to be answered, at a time when the Communist parties have abdicated their responsibility

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or are shrinking, when the Social Democracy is running out of steam and when the Greens are nibbling away at the latter's left flank.

A wide ranging reshuffle is underway, but it is taking place against a background of a decline in struggles, of the traditional workers' movement and of socialist class consciousness. At the same time the prolonged crisis of capitalism, now the sole master of the planet, is producing enormous discontent which has not yet taken political form.

The impressive levels of voter turnout in countries where voting is not obligatory — seen in Britain, France, Italy and to a lesser extent Germany — indicates the limits of de-politicization and individualism when people feel that there is something really at stake. At the same time the Green vote goes way beyond ecological problems, protest voting and the neo-reformist projects of the leaders of this movement. It is one symptom among others of a broad and persistent aspiration to a change in ways of life and in society.

This is also the framework in which the patchy but positive results received by candidates to the left of social democracy should be analyzed.
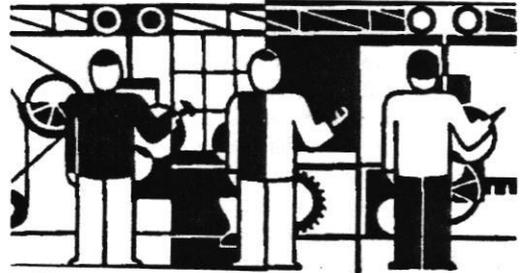
Defending "Communist" continuity

The Italian Party of Communist Refoundation (PRC) did well, with 5.6% in the votes for the lower chamber and 6.5% in the elections to the Senate, giving it a parliamentary group of 55 (35 and 20). The PRC has been catapulted onto the national political scene, with a strong grassroots implantation and a presence in elected state institutions. Defending the "Communist" continuity (Togliatti and Berlinguer) of the former Italian Communist Party (PCI), the PRC has also continued to defend a "Communist" perspective within society.

It is opposed to the social democratization of the Democratic Party of the Left (PDS — former PCI) which thus distances it from the PSI. The PRC differs from the French Communist Party (PCF) of Georges Marchais in that the former has had to break with the former Communist Party establishment. Up until now its tendency has been to the left, despite its heterogeneity — it cannot therefore be compared to the Refounders and Renewers in France. However it remains to be seen how and on what basis this heterogeneous "former post-Stalinist" party will succeed in stabilizing itself.

In France, Lutte Ouvrière got an average of slightly less than 2%, with a high point of 3% in Seine-Maritime across the 30 departments where it presented lists. The Revolutionary Communist League (LCR

The crisis of citizenship and the future of Europe

THE FOUR elections that have just taken place in Western Europe have had the press digging out a variety of metaphors to describe their significance. For the French, Italian and German elections the term "earthquake" has been a favourite. In these three countries, the traditional parties lost ground to movements more or less exterior to the state: ecologist movements, on the one hand, who have gained ground among the left electorate, and the far right on the other.

In Great Britain, the "surprise" of the Conservative victory in reality confirms the prolonged tendency of the relationship of forces in Europe to turn against the workng class. But Labour's defeat also marks the end of an era. The Kinnock leadership, despite the prodigious right-wing turn it has made, proved incapable of carrying Labour to victory, and the price paid in terms of rank-and-file demoralization will be high.

Across the European continent, in the West as the East, a series of problems are posed: racism, the crisis of political representation and the traditional parties, new problems of political rights and of citizenship, and so on. Is there a general approach to these questions, which could lead to the development of a unified strategy? There are at least a certain number of common features which we will attempt to outline.

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— French section of the Fourth International) put forward some lists where it has some implantation. Its high point was 5.57% in Gérardmer in the Vosges, where an LCR member Raymond Vacheron is an adviser to the town hall on environmental questions.

Here the LCR proposed a grand coalition of the Greens and the revolutionary left, but this was met with a cascade of sectarianism, from LO, the Greens and PCF dissi-

dents. These latter also did well in some places where they could put forward locally known personalities, beating the official PCF candidates with scores of between 7.2 to 12.4%.

Such results show us the first stirrings of something to the left of the social democracy. It also shows how elections can permit the revolutionary left to come out of its marginalization by reinforcing its links with the real movements in society. ★

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THE MAASTRICHT TREATY opened a new phase in European integration. It is at the moment hard to see whether real monetary and political union will be achieved by the end of the century. The much cited "political will" would not be enough by itself to overcome all the socio-economic hazards. However it is not necessary to assume that in 1999 everyone will be paying their bills in Ecus (the "European" currency) to draw certain conclusions:

1. The perspective of economic and monetary union (EMU) corresponds to the needs of capital. Besides the issue of competition with American and Japanese enterprises, the European single market corresponds to the cumulative tendencies of capital: exports and regroupments of capitals of different national origins; the development of production strategies and techniques whose costs are increasingly difficult to meet at a national level; and the inadequacy and lack of efficiency of the nation state in guaranteeing the general conditions of production.

The process underway in Europe, aiming at organic and ultimately political integration, although very bold and complicated, is only an example of a trend which is also shown by the development of new free trade zones such as the North American Free Trade Zone (NAFTA) or AFTA in Asia.

Thus, the project of European integration, as a form of the reorganization of capital, plays an important role in the changes underway in many fields of political and social life, independently of whether full EMU is achieved.[1]

2. Insofar as this perspective is not merely a result of political and ideological will but of a structural need of capital, one can ask what the consequences of failure would be. Given the size of the interlinked interests and the growing importance of continental and global strategies for the main European industrial and financial sectors, an irreversible setback

for the Union would have vast implications.

The multiplication of financial and trade deals and the complexity of the already functioning European legislation does not permit a long period of marking time. Either EMU is proceeded with or there will be a chaotic return to the protectionisms of a past age. A regression on this side of the Single Act would lead the continent into an unprecedented socio-economic crisis.

This is the reason for the famous "political will". The states and their governments are perfectly well aware of the danger and are moving forward pragmatically, reaching the necessary compromises.

The "catastrophe scenario" could in fact come about, notably owing to the grave institutional and political crises. The rise of the far right in a number of countries, the possibility of the Maastricht Treaty being rejected in Denmark, Britain or Ireland and the worsening of the monetary crisis under the impact of the recession, could derail the consensus and compromises reached between the governments.

There must be a certain conformity between the establishment of the credibility of a single "Ecu" currency and the formation of a common proto-state. A credible currency always needs the institutional support of a state. And it is here that the biggest problem is to be found; the fact that the prospect of a genuine European federation lags far behind that of the internationalization of capital.

3. There are many connections between the project for European integration and the ongoing reorganization of industry in its search for increased profits and new ways of organizing the labour process. Here we find the economies of scale which involve the search for the critical mass that is needed for some kinds of research to be undertaken, and for new products to be produced and marketed worldwide. The amount of money needed and the risks incurred require going

beyond the national or even regional level at a time when the market is already highly monopolized.

4. It is thus no surprise that European unification is being accompanied by systematic attacks on social benefits or that it works to increase the trend towards a reduction in job security and increasing enterprise closures. The social democratic delusions about economic union with a progressive social colouration have sunk without trace. Nor is there any evidence of the Maastricht Treaty reversing the ultra-free market trend of the Single Act. The notion of a social amendment of the latter, so popular in European social democratic circles, has given rise to a piece of paper, the Social Chapter, which is entirely without effect.
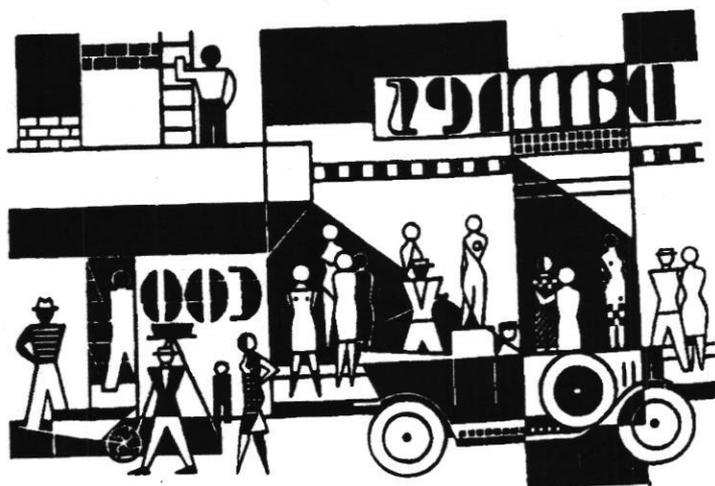
5. The upheavals are thus not being postponed until the last minute. They are happening now, as the capitalist reorganization upends, transforms and even destabilizes a part of its own foundations. And this is especially true for Europe's historic nation states, which have always played an essential role in ensuring, protecting and forming markets and underpinning the general conditions of production.

The institutional crisis is not the result of the growing powers of the Brussels bureaucrats. Its origin is in the loss of effectiveness of the national states as far as the regulation of an increasingly globalized capitalism is concerned. An overwhelming proportion of prices are realized at the international level and national anti-crisis policies lack all substance. External constraints are now decisive for all countries, however big.

The crisis of the historic nation states

The contradiction between the needs of capitalism and the restricted national spaces is stronger than ever, but the nation state remains the cornerstone of maintaining overall equilibrium. It retains a part of its former role in realizing value and in everything to do with social control, ideological production and the monopoly of force. But the state did not only operate through its territorial definition and specific legislation. Its legitimacy was imposed only by an idealized and often mythical relation to the national community.

Long histories in which wars and revolutions played the founding role have made the connection between national

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1. This side of the problem is overlooked by the French Trotskyist group Lutte Ouvrière when they say, in relation to the Maastricht Treaty, that "it would be all the same an advance compared to the old society which remains burdened to suffocation with anachronisms" (*Cahier du Cercle Léon Trotsky*, January 17, 1992).

ideology and the specific needs of the bourgeoisie more or less invisible. The state has thus appeared as immutable, as necessary to material life as to the sense of identity. It has been at one and the same time the welfare state and the repository of the national identity. How, then, could it be suspected of working for a specific class and in defence of a regime of exploitation?

But the day comes when the internationalization of capital brings the complexity of the problem to light: the state loses a part of its usefulness for the capitalists themselves. Still useful and indispensable in many respects, it is no longer however the sole repository of the interests of some capitalist sectors, whose policies are worked out on another level.

The result is the Single Act, which seeks to set up a system which will lead to the disappearance of national barriers to the circulation of goods, capital, services and people. It is always possible to see this in a relative light by pointing out that the state remains a central instrument for many major firms and sectors of the bourgeoisie and one can also point to the limited powers of the Community itself. But this cannot hide the fact that the new formula EEC means the end of the old role of the historic nation states. This is a major development.

Indeed, sometimes, this or that government aggravates this crisis for electoral reasons. This is the case when they fraudulently present unpopular measures which they are wholly in favour of, such as the reform of the Common Agricultural Policy or the recent re-authorization of night work for women, as the work of "Brussels' directives". By disowning responsibility they add to the feeling that the state is losing its purpose.

The rise of the regions

The same historic movement is also speeding up the unequal development inside the European states. The crisis and the partial remedies offered by capital have upset the regional hierarchies. The poorest and most deprived regions have not got out of the rut despite all the aid and the various plans. The others, on the contrary have seen big changes in the past 15 years. Regions which for more than a century were at the centre of capitalist development have often had to give way to others in terms of investment and the coming of new high tech industries. The result is that unemployment rates can be very different between the former industrial bastions and the new dynamic regions.

The inequalities and disparities are aggravated all the more in that "European construction" accentuates them, notably

by offering compensation for deregulation by redirecting non-national investments towards the regions.

So-called "structural funds" have been set up to compensate for the inequalities. Thus the institutions intervene but only after the damage has been done. They attempt to correct what has been wrought by private capital by the use of public money. According to a top Euro-official quoted in *Le Monde* (March 1, 1992), to keep unemployment in the most deprived regions at present levels in the year 2000 would require the creation of 2 million jobs, while to reach 50 to 70% of average community GDP these regions would have to have 15 years of growth rates from 1.5 to 2% above average European growth rates.

Thus we now have the so-called "cohesion funds" which are mainly aimed at the four poorest EEC countries (Greece, Ireland, Portugal and Spain) in the hope that they can make up some of the lag with the more prosperous regions.

There are few states in Europe whose history and rules are as centralist as the French state. Many to one degree or another have constitutional forms which give power to regional or other entities. This is true of Britain, the Spanish State, Belgium or Germany.

The previous European treaties did not deal with the question of regions. Only a "consultative committee" of local collectivities was set up in 1989. Now a consultative council of regional structures has been set up by the Maastricht Treaty. This represents a recognition of the structural changes underway and the new contradictions they give rise to, albeit in a modest form (since the delegations are in the last analysis under the control of the national governments). Some indication of the size of the problem is given by the fact that there are 180 legally recognized regions in the existing Community.

A new division of powers

As the Community's institutions gradually extend their field of intervention they inevitably reach the point where they interfere in what have been considered as regional prerogatives. This happened before Maastricht with the German Länder, which enjoyed a wide measure of autonomy on matters such as the environment or research and development. In order to ratify the Single Act therefore the German parliament had first to involve the Länder in the definition of the country's European policy.

The same problem is also found in the case of Belgium regarding the responsibilities of Flanders and Wallonia over education and culture.[2] And what will become of the Swiss Cantons if Switzerland

joins the Community?

These processes have only just begun since one is seeing, even in France, a policy of regional decentralization running parallel to European integration.

The current idea is that the Community should only deal with matters that cannot be better addressed at other levels, thus avoiding too great a transfer of power to the supra-national level. But if this same rule was applied to the individual countries it would in many cases imply a substantial strengthening of regional powers at the expense of the national states.

And already we are seeing the rise of powerful regional lobbies working around the European administration as well as a multiplication of agreements or convergences of interest between the regions of different countries. In Spain, the "autonomous communities" controlled funds totalling $300bn in 1991. The Basque country and eight other "autonomous communities" now have their own network in Brussels, from which some 7.3 billion Ecus will have been distributed to the 17 regions of the Spanish State between 1989 and 1993. Of France's 22 regions, 16 have ambassadors in the Belgian capital, from whence 17bn francs in structural funds are to be dispensed to France.

Many "regional cartels" exist, such as that linking Baden-Württemberg, Catalonia, Lombardy, and Rhone-Alpes region in France, or the Euro-region bringing together Northern France, Kent, Flanders, Wallonia and the region of Brussels.

In Germany, the Länder henceforth reserve the right to veto all European legislation. The Bundesrat will send a representative to the Council of Europe each time a point affecting the Länder's competence is raised.

Thus the national states are caught in a pincer movement between their growing difficulties in ensuring management of their part of world capitalism and regional strategies aimed at reaping the rewards of new forms of unequal development.

There is thus certainly a connection between this and the development of the crisis of the institutions in a whole series of countries. In most cases there is a debate not only about the constitution but about the very legal basis of the states. As the French president explained on February 29, 1992: "the contradiction is felt everywhere: it expresses itself by a sort of dialectic between the dislocation of today and the need for unity which continues to inhabit the souls of Europeans. But for the

2. The notions of "region" and "community" are different. In the case of Flanders community and region are expressed by one institution, since the cultural dimension has determined the administrative form.

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moment it is the dislocation that prevails. The period ahead of us is that of exasperation".

National identity and the rise of racism

In this period of dislocation there is much talk of the crisis of political representation and also of the crisis of national identity. This latter plays a role in the rise of racism and the far right. A report from the official Human Rights Commission in France insists that racism results from, among other things, "a feeling of a crisis of order and of national identity". The regions begin to develop their own political identities, the nation states lose some of their powers, but remain indispensable, while the Community assumes more and more supranational prerogatives. The resulting incoherence favours reactionary regionalisms on the part of the rich regions: the Vlaams Blok in Flanders, the Lombard Leagues for a "Republic of the North of Europe", the strong influence of the Republicans in Baden-Württemberg and so on.

The far right itself, furthermore, is not immune to differences on the European question. Its credo can be that of the defence of national sovereignty against the Brussels Eurocrats or a regional identity critical of the existing nation state.[3]

Citizenship and self-determination

This is the background to the developing debate on citizenship. In the recent regional elections in France, decentralization and the confirmation of regional prerogatives were presented as a way of reinforcing the links between the citizen and the decisions that directly affect her/him. That remains to be seen. In fact the crisis of representation that explains some very high abstention rates in cities and in poorer neighbourhoods is not to do with the "distance" between the citizen and the centres of power.

The problem of absence of control over elected representatives is as old as formal representative democracy itself. However it is interesting to note that people are more and more intolerant of a delegation of power without regular control or the right to interfere.

This may seem a surprising development at a moment of declining class consciousness and a weakening of mass mobilizations. Indeed, it might be argued that the increasing tendency to feel frustrated by the façade of democracy is apolitical and negative insofar as it is not combined with class consciousness.

However, such an argument misses the point. In fact such individual consciousness is not necessarily simply the fruit of the disintegration of the sense of belonging to a collectivity. It expresses — or at least can express in some forms — another aspect of class consciousness in new socio-economic conditions. The average cultural level has risen: urbanization has advanced to a point where it poses new problems for the environment and daily life; qualifications and the organization of work have changed; women have entered the labour market in great numbers; schooling has lengthened and so on. This has led to demands of a new type. The desire for control over one's own life could be at the origin of a new form of social consciousness.

For a long period the relation between the working class and the state and "citizenship" was more tenuous than has been the case in the period which began with the Second World War. Etienne Balibar has described this as "extra-territoriality".[4] This situation gave rise to specific forms of worker representation, of culture and of solidarity. The big proletarian concentrations voted massively and regularly for those who spoke in the name of the proletariat. And the swift loss of control over these political and union bureaucracies seemed to be compensated for by real gains, won first in struggle but then guaranteed by negotiations and legislation. The heads of the workers parties and unions felt they had been granted a permanent mandate to do deals with the opposing class.

What the worker had for her/himself and her/his family was the result of struggles. S/he voted so that these victories would be protected by people who represented her/his class. The bourgeoisie did not view her/him as a consumer, a user or even as a full citizen. Bourgeois opinion oscillated between paternalism and fear: one felt pity for the "small people" while lashing out at the "rabble" of the workers' neighbourhoods.

This "extra-territoriality" has disappeared to be replaced by the question of the *banlieues*, the immigrant ghettos and the dirty popular housing estates. These are all things which are very different from the former working class community with its close links between dwelling and workplace. We are seeing the rise of new forms of political and social exclusion.[5]

A changing sense of social being

The welfare state has thus progressively modified the individual's sense of her/himself. A double movement has taken place. The bureaucratic representatives of the class were more and more co-opted, integrated into and compromised by the overall management of the system. Then, the state increased and systematized its social management. The indirect "social" wage grew; social negotiations have taken on systematic form and the arbitrating functions of the public authorities have been extended.

The changes to the bourgeois state provoked and accompanied the changes to the representative bureaucracies of the workers' world. Prolonged management of local government meant increasing compromise with local business. The growing weight of co-operatives and co-management of social benefits increased the part of the funds they managed in the name of the state. As a result both in fact and in people's understanding the notion of class representation has lost its solidity. This development has found its own terminology: one talks of a "political class" which takes in both the parliamentary left parties and those of the traditional right.

3. See for example the ideas put forward by the leader of the Lombard Leagues, Gianfranco Miglio in *Le Monde* of April 1, 1992, where he explains that the Lombard identity makes them among the most European of Italians and argues in favour of a Europe of the regions.
4. Etienne Balibar, *Les frontières de la démocratie*. La Découverte, Paris, 1992.
5. Bernard Francq writing about the Belgian mining regions in *Contradictions*, no. 56, 1989 (Brussels). Alain Bihr in *L'homme et la société*, no. 98, 1990 (Paris) or François Bon in "Ouvrier, ouvrières", *Autrement*, January 1992, Paris.

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Most people view this strange class as consisting of all those who engage in politics to get their slice of the cake, a sentiment exploited by the far right.

Social services have been undermined by austerity policies to the point where it has become difficult today to present policies based on defending nationalizations in a progressive light. Almost everywhere efforts at retraining have given way to a straightforward management of unemployment.[6] Collective contract bargaining has been whittled away in many countries. The education system is in a crisis that removes any illusion of equality of opportunity. Exclusion is on the order of the day everywhere both in the social and the political fields. In these circumstances the state finds it increasingly difficult to present itself as standing above classes, enforcing justice through redistribution. On the other hand its class function is no more clear. For most people it is viewed simply as the lair of various *mafias*.

Can this suspicion of politicians be overcome by the development of a "new citizenship" based on regions or nationality? Will things get better if Scots vote as Scots and Walloons as Walloons? There is no chance of this insofar as the institutions remain at the convenience of the dictatorship of the market and of profits.

A "new citizenship" which simply reproduces at a local level the same delegations of power as at a national level, with the absence of the right of direct intervention by the populations, without the right to recall delegates, without a proper circulation of information and so on, will do nothing to resolve the present frustration. Worse, the argument that "small is beautiful" ends up by limiting people's field of understanding.

This is the first dilemma. The European Economic Community is developing a type of state intervention without a state. Bourgeois parliamentary democracy as conceived in the framework of nation states lacks any real expression at the Community level. In the prevailing conditions of institutional dislocation the search for a new right to expression and the desire to decide for oneself focus more easily on the "closest" institutions. However nothing can really be resolved without combining local means of social control with the national and European level of decision making. It is useless to try and separate these two levels and argue that European construction means that a large part of power must inevitably become increasingly inaccessible.

"To change life" (as the electoral slogan of the French Socialist Party promised in 1980) cannot only be done at the level of the enterprise, the city or the region. What is needed are forms of democracy that connect the general and the particular.

It is not that we should deny the relevance of local, regional or national demands. On the contrary, the new society we want must be based on a great extension of local self-organization and self-determination. But such a perspective can only be credible if we invent new coherent institutions that can match up to the socio-economic changes, which means taking on the entire European dimension.

The rise of nationalism in Eastern Europe

It is in this framework that we must address the questions of nationhood and identity. In *Le Monde* of September 20, 1991, François Mitterrand opined that "I do not think that the end of human progress should be to recreate a Europe of ethnicities or tribes". But the current national crises in central and eastern Europe are not simply the product of a past unchanged in the Communist years. Even if they are nourished by references to the past their vitality is a product of more recent history. Or to put it another way, the speed and above all the unevenness of the introduction of the market has produced big social and political shocks without any social class or political regime being able to direct events.

This speed and unevenness requires violence. This has taken the form of war, since it is by this means that the reformed bureaucracies and the political cliques try to establish their national legitimacy. War is all the more necessary in that the capitalist transformation depends largely on Western investment.

This manna is divided up according to the rule: what Croatia gets, Serbia will not get. Capitalism can only operate by setting all the countries, regions and people in competition with one another. The new political regimes, which are under no direct control and which combine the old bureaucratic order with a charade of parliamentary democracy, sometimes need war to gain international recognition or consolidate a new sovereignty. No new stable social system has been formed but rather parties and leading layers which have inherited a portion of the old state, army and resources — enough to sustain a war. The feelings of the population and their right to choose plays hardly any role and in the general disarray manipulations and propaganda have an impact.

Nonetheless, let us not forget that at the outset those who took part in and rejoiced in the fall of Stalinism did so out of a desire to take control of their own destinies — whether as part of a national entity or as individuals.

The extreme weakness of class consciousness and the absence of any political projects opposing at one and the same time Stalinism and the dictatorship of the market have ended up by exacerbating the divide between civic and worker consciousness. The search for democracy did not pass through the enterprise, and the issue of what one produces and why was hardly raised.

The rebellion in the East identified with the Western-style of parliamentary democracy, with its inherent tendency to detach political power from social control. This is why the diverse national questions did not come together into a radicalization involving self-determination and rank-and-file democracy, and why the demands for national self-determination did not result in a broad social movement that could definitively do away with the vestiges of the Stalinist past.

In fact various factions of the bureaucracy took over the national, regional or language questions and came up with chauvinist answers that corresponded to their own social interests.
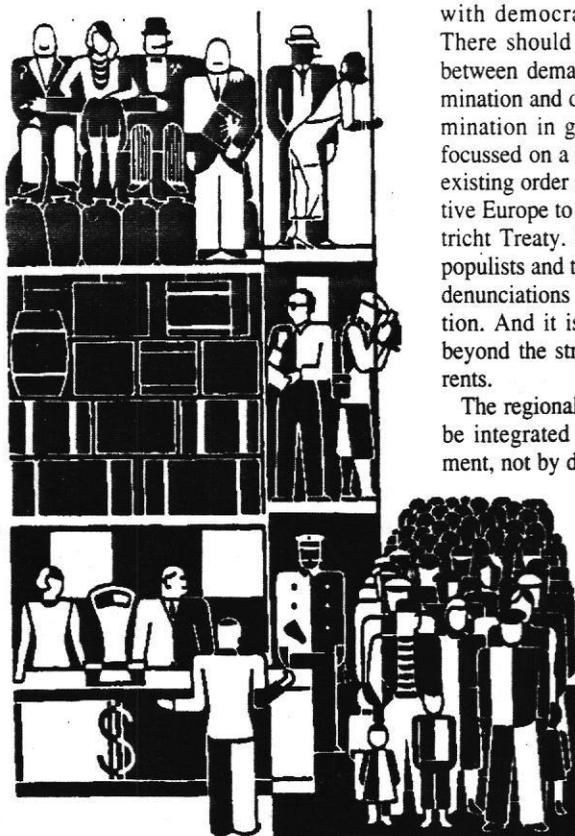
This is why there has not yet been any overall internationalist response to the crisis in what were formerly the Soviet Union and Yugoslavia, where racist and exclusionist themes have dominated.

Not all forms of oppression are colonial. Third World experience has already shown, starting with Black Africa, that the rise of ethnicity is not the same as national demands. The ethnic or regional identity can overwhelm any other form of social consciousness when it appears to offer the easiest explanation of a situation of inequality and marginalization. In this it can furthermore give rise to a legitimate revolt, expressing the demands of the excluded.

However, there also exists another possible response to dependence, oppression or the effects of unequal development: a grassroots democracy, which allows the self-determination of all. In heavily urbanized societies where the overwhelming majority of the population are wage workers, such a choice is objectively possible — its absence cannot be put down to socio-economic backwardness.

And if, on the other hand, the nation exists or is in the process of formation having won sovereignty, it is necessary that this takes place as far as possible in connection with an internationalist, non-chauvinist project.

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6. This is also the case in countries where there is a long tradition of apprenticeships. In Britain, the Industrial Training Act (1964) was replaced by the Youth Training Scheme (1980). The first was financed by businesses, the second by the state. The first was managed on a parity basis by business and the unions, the second by the bosses alone.

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...and in Western Europe

Just as the rise of nationalism in the East, and the form it has taken, is the product of contemporary developments, so it is wrong to look at the various emerging or persisting national questions in Western Europe simply as the result of contagion from the East. These too are the result of the current economic and institutional crises of Western Europe.

However these demands, too, can take a reactionary form. It is in the name of regional identity that the Flemish Vlaams Blok gets its votes and the Lombard Leagues garnered around 10% in Italy, getting 23.4% in Milan, where they are the biggest party. The French National Front (FN) has employed demagogy about local (anti-immigrant) identity to dig itself in in the Marseilles region. All the desires to become masters in one's own house can have reactionary interpretations.

This is also the case in France with the "hunting and fishing" electoral slates which claim to represent the real France and its rural traditions. There is also the possibility of a reactionary variant of ecology; the FN is currently working out a programme on the defence of the environment — and of the "species" known as the French people![7]

Thus we have to find a way of linking up all the national and regional pressures

with democratic and social demands. There should be no separation allowed between demands for national self-determination and demands for civil self-determination in general. All this should be focussed on a strategy for overturning the existing order and constructing an alternative Europe to that embodied in the Maastricht Treaty. Here we can challenge the populists and the far right on the terrain of denunciations of the state and of corruption. And it is here also that we can go beyond the strategies of the ecology currents.

The regional and national questions can be integrated in a broader social movement, not by denying them but by placing them from the outset in an internationalist and anti-capitalist context. As the Basque revolutionary José Iriarte has written: "It is necessary to understand that a good part of the population has diverse national origins and that, in order to win it to a Basque national project, it will be important to recognize and respect the cultural rights stemming from that origin.

"This destatization of the nation also involves a self-managing economic project, the free association of the producers and of units of production, an articulation between the social plan and those sectors where the market is judged necessary...

"The path of self-managed independence rejecting both the existing order and the statist and European capitalist road is on the agenda; it could help us to go beyond the limits of strictly national independence" (*IV* no. 221, February 3, 1992).

Racism and the labour market

Central to any discussion of citizenship and rights is the question of racism and of the situation of immigrants from the Third World or Eastern Europe. Here, furthermore, we again run up against the producer/citizen dichotomy. In any system of labour market segregation, a disparity in civil rights accompanies the stratification of the labour market. This was for a long time true for women's right to vote, as for South Africa's apartheid system. The end of extra-economic systems of discrimination does not at all mean that the segregations disappear. The fate of the majority of women workers or of Blacks in the post-apartheid South Africa show this clearly.

But, one way or another, a part of the

labour force does not enjoy civil rights. These segregations are justified in the name of a variety of "natural" prejudices — gender, nationality, culture or race. The state muddies its class nature in the eyes of the working class by taking a different attitude to different groups of workers. It grants rights to some and refuses them to others. Some are full citizens, others something less than that.

This state racism is part of the management of the labour force in the interests of capital and it is not a speciality of either the far right, the social democracy or the traditional right. It is a permanent feature of the bourgeois state, flowing from the overall conditions of production, rather than from the pressure of particular demagogic anti-immigrant campaigns. It is expressed in the Schengen Accord regulating immigration and refugee affairs and in the various European meetings dealing with immigration and "new migratory flows".

From this point of view it is interesting to look at what is happening with respect to Eastern Europe. In these countries, where the transition to capitalism remains slow, chaotic and inconsistent, there is a marked lack of harmony between the circulation of capital, of goods and of people. The conditions created by the fall of the Berlin Wall have meant that a substantial part of the labour force in these countries is free to sell its labour power at a time when the other parts of the market economy are still in their infancy. The result is that some of these people feel free (having been "liberated from Communism") to come to sell their labour power on the West European market.

This poses problems for our Communitarians. We have seen the energy with which Italy has rejected Albanian emigrants, while the current debate in Germany on the right of asylum shows that more is involved than simply far right ideology and prejudices.

The states thus find themselves obliged to devise new rules to maintain existing arrangements and divisions on the world market in order to preserve the split between the free movement of capital and goods on the one hand and restrictions on the movement of people on the other. New laws and new repression. The state is developing its functional racism.

For this the state needs a communitarian, national or cultural justification. To break up the possible unity of all those who sell their labour power it presents an idealized fiction of the nation and of ethnicity. Segregation is to be built into the definition of citizenship.

The elusive citizen

The "citizen" as promoted in bourgeois

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democratic theory cannot be found either in Western or Eastern Europe. In fact the desired-for separation between the citizen and the producer is painstakingly reproduced by the regimes. The less power the producer has the less the citizen can control her/his life and society. But now the economic crisis, the social changes and the very process of European unification itself increasingly expose the impotent emptiness inside the notion of the "citizen".

The populations are becoming just as preoccupied with their ability to determine their professional fate as their fate as users. They are no more inclined to accept layoffs as a simple act of fate than to accept the construction of a motorway outside their front door in the name of the "general interest". Many can no longer see why the public interest justifies military spending and the despatch of troops overseas. They are also less and less able to grasp what the point is in regularly voting for political cliques when this has no practical effect on the education system, on information, on decision-making and so on.

The far right seizes the initiative

Two frustrations live side by side: that of a formal citizenship without power and that of social insecurity. The political force that is able to respond to these problems will be able to give hope and even devise a social counter-project. At the moment it is the far right that is making the running on this. Taking the crisis of the state as its starting point, by demonizing "the others" (immigrants, the Third World or even simply other parts of their own country) it aspires to respond to the popular yearning for a rational world without corruption or misery, a "re-established", "natural" order of things.

Several things flow from this:

● The struggle for equal rights within the framework of the existing states is an important part of the democratic and anti-racist battle. But it cannot provide a strategy in and of itself. Furthermore, in, for example Britain, the struggle against racism cannot centre around the right to vote, since many "Black people" already have voting rights. In France also a large part of the immigrants originating from the former colonies have French citizenship, without for all that being spared racism or being considered as forming a specific contingent of the labour force.

Thus, in every case, the struggle against racism and for civic equality must be entwined with two other developments of a more strictly subversive kind: an anti-racism posed directly on the European level, calling for equal rights throughout the EEC for all those who live and work there; and an anti-racism that takes up the issue of an extension of the political rights of all, as opposed to the present, formal and empty citizenship.

● We need to address the debate on the "new citizenship" and give it a radical and universal content which expresses the need for generalized social control, rank-and-file democracy and self-determination. We should conduct a systematic critique of bourgeois representative democracy. We should progressively disseminate the notion of and the demand for the right of veto, inspection and transparency and for the recallability of elected representatives.

We should not leave a monopoly on this kind of thing in the hands of the various ecologist currents who stop halfway, usually restricting their proposals for rank-and-file democracy to the small scale. In fact it should be extended and considered as a demand for all levels. It makes no sense to be in favour of the right of inspection or veto of the population of a village over a road project while remaining satisfied with the traditional national parliamentary system. We need to offer a coherent project that goes beyond national institutions and poses the problem of a different Europe to that on offer, based on generalized social control that allows priority to be given to society's fundamental social and ecological needs.

● This is the only way to respond to the debate on the Community's "democratic deficit". The problem is not to reform the voting system for the Strasbourg parliament or to referee the dispute between the Brussels Commission and the European parliament. This is why any notion of a European constituent assembly will be nothing more than a confused slogan if it does not come at the end of a long trench war on the right of veto or of rank-and-file control, in villages and cities, neighbourhoods and regions.

Only the multiplication of basic social and political battles over questions of citizenship and control will make it possible to conclude with a Europe-wide central objective such as that of a European constituent assembly. In the absence of such groundwork, such a slogan can only be interpreted in the sense of a "left democratic" management of the existing institutions, with no subversive dynamic. We are not in a situation where it is necessary to "found" or legitimate a nation by a constituting act.

What matters in a slogan is its ability to stimulate and mobilize. It is certainly true that the formula for a European regime is yet to be defined, but it is useless to attempt to reverse the natural sequence of events.

A mass experience is needed not only to raise people's sights but also to give credibility to a truly internationalist vision. It would thus be best to begin by taking the time to define strategies for a challenge at the grassroots level and show that the "new citizenship" can be more than a bit of sales talk if this means new social solidarity, equal rights and if it involves the reunification of the citizen and the producer.

Women and the "new citizenship"

Central to any such conception is the question of the place of women. In the French department of Alsace a women's electoral slate demanding proper representation for women got 6%. Here also there is a vast field of new experiences to clear. It is really quite striking how easily our opinion formers talk about the "new citizenship" without once mentioning the women's dimension, as if the "new citizenship" was merely a matter of institutional reforms, and as if discrimination over political rights had nothing to do with the sexual division of labour. The genuine "new citizenship" we are proposing will arise on the ruins of both capitalism and the patriarchy and the battle we are waging is at once anti-capitalist and feminist. A strong autonomous women's movement could be central to the battle for social control.

Producers and citizens

Various initiatives taking up the themes outlined above have recently appeared. In France, the March 1992 issue of the review "*M*" published a "citizens' manifesto" signed by various intellectuals, which highlighted "the right for all to be socially useful and for this usefulness to be recognized". Almost at the same time an appeal was launched entitled "The Left: After the End" in which, starting out from the crisis of representation, a "new balance of powers" is demanded to "revive public debate".[8] The appeal concludes with the words "let us work towards a modern and modest utopia, which no longer sets the individual against society, but which sketches out a future; to make possible in one and the same gesture more individuality and more sociability".

In Belgium two parallel initiatives have seen the light of day. After the shock of the elections of November 24, 1990 in which the Vlaams Blok got 25% in Antwerp a "Charter 91" appeared in Flanders which presented itself as a "citizens' movement". It aims for the "setting up of

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7. Speech of Bruno Mégret, conference of the Front National, Fréju, 1991.
8. *Le Monde*, April 2, 1992.

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new institutions permitting the direct control and participation of the citizen". It denounces the crisis, the deterioration of the cities, racism and an Economic and Monetary Union that has not been democratically worked out. A similar Charter has started up in Wallonia.

This March a "European citizens' conference" took place in the Slovak capital Bratislava, which gave special attention to the themes of nationalism and racism. Here, members of various movements from throughout Europe debated out problems of citizenship and Europe's political institutions.[9] Thus the problems are already being exposed.

We should not let ourselves be fobbed off with various adjustments which give an illusion of fundamental change. The right of every citizen of an EEC country to vote and stand for office in local elections throughout the Community does not represent progress insofar as it introduces a "European identity" founded on the imperialist and security obsessed Schengen accord.

The recent failure of the local referendum in Amsterdam on the regulation of car traffic shows that it is not thus that one gives the power of decision to the working population. Furthermore, the right of immigrants to vote in local elections in the Netherlands, although evidently a gain that must be defended, does not resolve the problem of racism.

The bourgeois institutions do not offer the tiniest portion of real civil rights and can produce only a pretence of direct democracy. The desire and the real possibility for control will come from the mass mobilizations, independently of the institutions — nothing to do with any strategy of nibbling at the edges or of setting up a "counter-power" to that of the state.

A grassroots democracy will not be enough; it is necessary to challenge the established order from top to bottom. To do this the division between workplace struggles and social movements has to be overcome.

To do this two mistakes have to be avoided; one is to believe that workplace struggles belong to the past of the workers' movement, the other that social movements outside the workplaces represent nothing more than a distorted, insipid and temporary deviation from the "real" class struggle. In fact both reflect a separation consciously wrought by the bourgeoisie to undermine class consciousness. The first are tied to the struggle at the

point of production, the second take place in the sphere of the reproduction of the labour force. Here we touch upon a still developing debate on the nature and heterogeneity of the "revolutionary subject" and on the diversity of the emancipatory movements.

But let us dream a little around the subject of the "reconstruction" of the workers' and social movements... Let us imagine centres in neighbourhoods and cities where all the various associations and unions come together, where it will be possible to work in and construct alliances between anti-militarist, feminist,

lesbian and gay, anti-racist and housing movements, cultural and youth movements, alternative educational circles, unions and so on. Places where it will be possible to work to reunite the broken social tissue of the housing estates and working class neighbourhoods, places open to all, representing a counter power, centres for mobilization and vigilance.

This could permit the development of united mass campaigns which would bring together producer and citizen. At this level I am in total agreement with Andre Gorz when he writes "the workers' movement must remember... that it originated with workers' cultural associations. It can only continue as a movement if it takes an interest in human development outside as much as inside the workplace".[10]

The crisis of the state: a challenge to the left

The crisis of the state today offers us some opportunities to restore coherence and also credibility to new forms of radicalization leading to mass experiences of civil disobedience. By using the present institutional crises to denounce the way in which the system organizes the split between the two sides of our social being it will be possible to restore credit to the

idea of an alternative society. A mass rejection of conscription or a refusal to pay for military spending could lead to a rebirth of militant anti-militarism. Feminism can regain a broad audience by taking up issues that affect women at work and broader issues of equality.

We can recall in this respect the debate conducted by British workers at Lucas Aerospace, who, in 1975, discussed the reconversion of their enterprise from military to civilian enterprises, or the refusal to pay the Poll Tax or the campaign in Switzerland for the abolition of the army or the Swiss women's strike in 1991. All these struggles point in the same direction.

On the other hand we are not proposing a fragmented strategy; it would be the convergence of such movements and their independence of the states and the European institutions that could lead to a reactivation of anti-capitalist struggles. This implies at the same time a relaunching of the union movements and the development of revolutionary political forces in a pluralist and democratic framework. We need to think through a whole new anti-capitalist strategy, looking again at the whole issue of social control and dual power.

The development of capitalism is thus opening up for us a new field for reflection. The time is passed when transitional and anti-capitalist demands could be conceived in a strictly national framework (nationalization under workers control; "open the books"). The challenge now is to find ways of linking up movements of struggle and control in all fields of social life — education, transport, housing, workplace struggles, anti-racism, anti-militarism, anti-sexism and so on, with all this coming together on a European scale. That is to say we must renounce a backward looking defence of "national sovereignty" of the sort proposed by the French Communist Party.

Building this bridge is now a life or death question for the European revolutionary left: to find our feet in the crisis of the nation state, unify the different arenas of struggle and restore the credibility of the socialist project by defining an alternative Europe to that of Maastricht. ★

9. Helsinki Citizens' Assembly, second general assembly, March 36-29, 1992, Bratislava.
10. André Gorz, *Métamorphose du travail*, Galilée. Paris 1989.
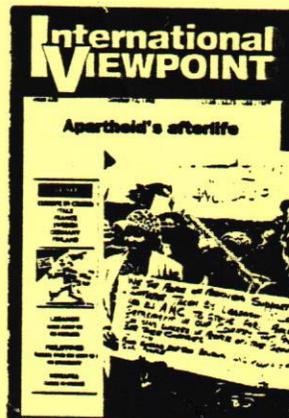
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