



A magnificent opportunity...

Some ideas on migration, capitalism and social revolts

I. INTRODUCTION

This text comes from practical questions linked to the tenure of an ECOFIN meeting (European financial ministers gathering from the 30th September to the 1st October) and of a European Trade Union demonstration (on the 29th September - 3rd October). During discussions, we questioned our position with regard to this summit. Our reflexions quickly went to « the » current crisis and his social and political effects, in the meantime increase of racist politics and behaviours, and of social revolts and mass-movements. Questions on these effects are finally the main reason for this text, with the last September week in Brussels as background. From a radical position against borders and for freedom of movement, we propose here a few ideas on the « No Border movement », on relations between anti-migration and economic European politics, and on the actual blooming of social revolts. Ideas which aim to bring reflections, discussions ... and actions.

II. ABOUT OUR LIMITS

To begin with, we thought about how the “No Border activists”, in a larger sense, connect usually migration policies to economical policies. In these discourses we can distinguish two main poles, in between a variety of discussions and positions against borders are taking place.

Two currents

On one hand, there is a radical current that can be defined as developing a discourse for absolute freedom of movement and settling, against borders, against the state and against capitalism. This discourse, often connected to direct actions, tries to frame the fight against anti-migration politics into a criticism of the capitalist system. Nevertheless, the way it is expressed is often reduced to a total rejection of all capitalist structures, which only reaches to people already convinced. On the other hand, we can identify a moderate current, that emphasizes more on the process of migrants regularization and the opposition to detention-camps. This discourse usually reaches a deadlock on the question of linking political and economical frameworks in which anti-migration politics are integrated.

Paradox

We realize that these different discourses have in common to focus mainly on the repression against migrants. The insistence upon this question is understandable, it is the most outrageous aspect of the situation of migrants, who themselves consider it as the main issue: to exit the circle of repression and to be able to live a “normal” life. We think, nevertheless, that there is a designated weakness, a one-dimensional aspect of the No Border discourses. The capitalist handling of migrants work and its effects on economic matters and social rights has nearly never been used as a central argument in the opposition to borders and the fights for freedom

of movement. Furthermore, except Frontex, we can consider that the “european power”, despite its decisive and organizational importance concerning the handling of migration movements, has being globally spared off criticism and actions from the No Border movement.

Leaving this aside constitutes from our point of view a paradox : we are many to think that the handling of migrations reveals the real face of capitalism and ables us to look through the future trends in our societies evolutions (militarization of borders and of the society in general, control-technologies development, labour precarisation, social rights and freedom of speech destruction...). Nevertheless, it's very seldom that, beginning from the migration question, we manage to develop discourses or actions concerning other aspects of society.

III. MIGRATIONS IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF ECONOMIC AND SECURITARIAN EUROPE

Migration exists everywhere, internationally or locally, linked to wars, work or studies, as a result of climatechange or meetings. Many from us don't speak the languages of their grand-parents, we don't live where our parents lived and our movements will not hold back. “Migrants” or “natives”, the only identities stamped on us, are printed by the state on paper and those printed by advertisement and tv in our minds, identities that are strange to us. The classification between migrants and “natives” has no sense anymore. However, those who are communally called “sans-papiers” are particular migrants, their rights are non-existent, they are forced to clandestinity and they represent the figure of the ultimate “foreigner”. The capitalist system makes them marginal and applies on them particular politics. These politics and their links with “the rest of society” are what we are interested in.

The development of European migration policies should be analyzed in the context of the development of the European Union, in so far as it is a process of an economic system opening up its labour market. By observing E.U.'s history and the enlargement process that followed throughout its 60 years of existence, we can see that the capitalist handling of migration movements is directly linked to the economic situation. Periods of crisis or economic growth can transform migration policies radically, which in turn can have huge effects on economic and security policies.

The waves of migration

In the last century, after the second world war, work-related migration began to intensify. The first important wave of migration, in the fifties and sixties, had been constituted by “industrial” migration, particularly from the South of Europe and other Mediterranean countries to the northern countries. Thirty years later, the fall of the “iron curtain” provoked a new wage of migrants coming from the East attracted by the image of “safe old Europe”. Simultaneous to this process, the

number of non-Europeans trying to join Europe, increased from year to year.

We can consider one main difference between migration politics in the fifties and those from the eighties on. For a first time, industries and mines needed cheap and numerous work forces, which implicated a relatively “open” migration. In succession, the de-industrialisation, the end of full-employment and increase of mass-unemployment activates a drastic restriction of conditions of migrations. This difference in the handling of migration movements let the economic interests appear as the main criteria used by the capitalist system to define their migration politics.

From security architecture...

Today, in the enlarged E.U., European institutional system architecture has reached a new dimension and a higher level in terms of state cooperation (Dublin II) and security procedures. Since the collapse of the Soviet-union, the borders of the “project Europa” expanded and the Union took the chance to build up an gigantic security architecture, based on the development of new technologies and huge financial possibilities. This was followed on the first stage by the construction of detention camps and the increase of social control on a domestic level. On the second stage, countries like Italy, Greece and Spain started to build more and more defense mechanisms against migration, with the help of the European migration agency Frontex. These countries constitute the final internal barrier against the infamous “invasion of Europe”. Finally there is an externalization of the borders to Mediterranean countries like Libya, Tunisia and Morocco where European funds are being used to build detention camps and to improve the control of their borders. The deaths at the borders in the Mediterranean Sea and conditions of detention camps like Pagani in Lesbos, are not produced anymore by a single country interest but are part of European economical and migration strategies.

...to labour-market architecture

Parallel to this expansion of repression and militarization of borders, we witness the reconstruction of the labour-market. The tricky part for the state government is to keep the balance to control effectively this market. The governments use migration in two principal economic ways. On one hand, they try to control migration to answer economic needs, a limited and specialized migration. And on the other hand, they use immigration to promote competition between workers, and from there to limit the social demands and deregulate the labour-market.

Selection of work-permissions (in function of the markets needs), flexibility of work (unregistered work, part-time-work), reduction of wages, attacks against social rights, destruction of pensions, the ever increase of rents. All these dynamics can only be seen as an the levelling of work conditions of local workers to the situation that migrants know since a very long time, with clandestinity as a special bonus. This is the objective of governments and European institutions. At first, the work conditions and social practices are being applied to migrants, legitimating this particular status by the fact that they are foreigners without any rights. After that, technics for managing migrations are expanded to the handling of the whole population. Of course, at the heart of this dynamic, stands the public argumentation on “unproductive and benefits abusing foreigners”, designated responsible for all economic and social disasters in our societies.

E.U. : The way to the top

These strategies of migration/population control make clear where the E.U. is heading for: a stable migration policy, tight social measures (now and then, depending on the situation of home-economy) and a new promoted euronationalism to take its position as a global player on the global market, Germany and France in leading position. The long-term goal is to liberalize the market and to drop the “social-state”, to stay alive in the competition against the “masters of workers-oppression” USA and China. This new ideology of euronationalism is based on the development of a European historical understanding after the second world war. The history is being turned around in order to redefine a new Europe which has learned from the two world wars and is heading to « peaceful » economical and political state-cooperation. This theory forgets about the ongoing social war, the exploitation of workers and migrants, and about the ongoing “humanitary” wars and other operations of “maintaining peace”, via NATO or not, from different European countries in Serbia, Afghanistan, Irak or Somalia.

Last years have showed that this ambitious project is very difficult to fulfill. On the political level, the rejection of a European Constitution by some member states damaged this “European dream”. On the economical level, the financial crisis, which started at the beginning of the new century, stopped the economic growth and revealed one more time the effects of world competition, overproduction and speculation. In this time of crisis and (for now) failure to achieve these aims, one of the principal questions is: how will the state-governments try to compensate the handling of “the financial threat”?

IV. FEAR AND PATRIOTISM IN PERIOD OF « CRISIS »

It has been two years since the banks and stock markets began to collapse. Billions of Euros have been wasted, designated banks are being reloaded by incredible profits, others stay unstable, and the breakdown of stock-markets and the Euro continues. In a short time, the crisis of the financial system became a crisis of the states. After doing everything to save the financial system, the governments begin now to make the “people pay”: Greece, Romania, Spain, Great Britain... This umpteenth crisis of capitalism is, as usual, a wonderful opportunity for the governments and the international institutions: austerity-plans, which have been or will be voted for, are real plans of social destruction.

Austerity-plans as logical development

This first opportunity of a real act of “European-crisis-management”, after the IMF-intervention in Romania, was the state-debt crisis of Greece. The international capital, in form of the E.U., IMF and the Greek state, tries to turn the country in a social-experiment-field for a new shock-doctrine.



Many social rights that have been defended by workers since three decades, will be abolished within two years. The first package of measures voted on the sixth of May by the Greek parliament shows the way: cut in wages up to thirty percent, freezing of wages and pensions in the state sectors. These measures on wages are followed by an increase of sell taxes and special taxes on tobacco, alcohol and betting. Changes will also occur in the social system: cuts in pensions and unemployment benefits, destruction of social security. The next waves of measures are being prepared for the next year, under the severe surveillance of the “control commission”. The effects of the austerity policies are just beginning to produce their effects: massive job cuts, more and more part-time jobs and mass creation of temporary employment.

Finally, the austerity-plans imposed in the frame of “the” crisis are certainly a new stage in the process of precarisation of work, in the application of handling techniques of immigration as means of population management. Far away from being exceptional policies, these anti-social reforms are the logical continuation of dynamics which started with the creation and development of the European “project”. The specificity of these measures can be found in their rarely seen social violence and their integration in a more and more racist and security-focused political frame, in a political project based on fear management.



Fear politics and patriotism

If we observe the discourses developed by governments, we assess that they justify their handling of the crisis by fear driven arguments, with the foreigner as fear's principal cause. The handling of fear as a mechanism of social transformation operates in different ways. One way is to create a physical fear,

based on the figure of young delinquent migrants, to legitimate the development of control technics (police presence, cameras, archiving...) and repression structures (construction of prisons and detention-camps, “freedom” laws, agile justice...). This fear takes on symbolic forms, specifically based on “unaddressable differences” between Islam and “western way of life”. Controversies around supposed habits like the way people dress (veil), sexuality (polygamy), food (hallaq and sacrificial lambs), are nothing but symbolic manipulations created in order to give impressions of a threat looming on occidental traditions and of a superiority of these on an archaic muslim way of life. Furthermore, it is about to create an economic fear based on the rarity of work and on the figure of the working migrant, in order to accept at the end the deregulation of labour.

These politics of fear are naturally articulated around the motion of crisis. Should it be to invest billions in banks or to impose anti-social reforms, the governmental discourses

remain the same: “In the context of the crisis, sacrifices are necessary to save our system”. This appeal to economical patriotism doubles in a appeal to cultural patriotism, in a discourse on national identity, on the peril for our societies represented by migration. In this manner, the governments present themselves as defending the electors and channel popular anger against the capitalistic inequalities towards the figure of the migrant, seen as the ultimate economical, physical or cultural enemy, both inside and outside. This process aims to hide that the consequences of the crisis are the same for “natives” and “migrants”: an aggravation of life conditions and a intensified tracking of all the non-profitable individuals – fired workers, unemployed workers cut off from benefits, detained and evicted migrants

From xenophobia to cosmopolitanism?

Socially, we can expect that the current reforms produce effects going in two main directions: on one hand, a questioning of the institutions and even maybe of the capitalist system; on the other hand, an identitarian fall-back and a strengthening of xenophobic feelings and discourses. These two directions may seem contradictory but are nonetheless often complementary. In an organized form, they are expressed in the progression of right-wing political parties and racism issue within some Unions. On an individual level, the mixture of anti-institutional and anti-migration feelings are developing in alarming manner. This is where the central challenge but also the principal danger for the No Border movement lies: in the risk of reinforcing and anchoring durable xenophobic feelings, in the risk to return to a national and nationalist Europe, more and more closed and racist.

This mixture of sentiments reflects a reality from which the No Border movement can not escape: in our societies, migration and the manner in which it is handled represents often a point of rupture, the crystallization of the debate to vacate finally the reject of the other. It's the case in the urbanistic level (creation of banlieues and ghettos), on a cultural level (interdiction of veil), and on economical level (acceptance of national competition of work, but not with migrants). It is still good to assert that the migrations and the population blending have always took place, today these phenomenas reach such a level that they cannot be left aside in a decent political position. Number of human beings on earth, social and international inequalities of capitalist system, growth of enormous megalopolis, development of transport way, attractiveness of the supposed commodity society and propaganda-technologies – all this provokes migrations and participates in the reinforcements of inequalities, which in return are generating tensions. From there, how in this frame, or rather outside of it, develop cosmopolitan cities, obtain peaceful and fluid cohabitation of cultures and ways of life? This question remains open...

V. SOCIAL MOVEMENTS AND PERSPECTIVES

Some have answers to this question. Where we are looking for cosmopolitanism the governments are playing on tensions between communities and goading on the fear of the other. Despite this, we begin to see the development of social movements opposing to economical state policies, for example in Romania and Greece. In Greece a heterogeneous movement with different political goals has been protesting against the austerity plans of the government, IMF and E.U. The biggest success of this mobilization, mainly controlled by the social-democratic unions, was the fifth of May, when



hundreds of thousands of people all over Greece took part in the most massive demonstrations since the end of the Greek dictatorship in 1974. State-employees, private workers, anarchists, students and also migrants participated in the storming of the parliament. During the waves of attacks on the parliament a shocking message arrived over the mass medias : three people lost their life in a fire attack on the Marfin-Bank. This event paralyzed the movement and on the sixth of May the parliament could vote calmly the first measure-package. All over Greece, discussions, in anarchist circles and outside, opened about militant practices and the movement's heterogeneity. The day of the fifth of May showed what could be possible for a social movement, but also how a movement can be paralyzed in a time where radical social changes are possible... Predictions for the moment are hard but one thing is sure: The Greek government will continue to push austerity measures and will most probably be confronted again with protests. In a global perspective, we could assert in the last years that the European social movements often stay closed in a national logic of defending existing social rights, which makes it difficult for them to enlarge their criticism beyond the opposition to a particular reform and to consider other solutions than these attached to the historical nation-state framework. It is actually one of the biggest challenges for the Greek movement: the abandon of nation oriented views and the hope for a democratic reform of the system.

Find the common to drop off national identities

To achieve that social revolts leave behind their national identities, it's important to leave the isolation of the no-border-movement, to create links with actors of the ongoing struggles. Obtaining this result implies to underline the handling of migrations in the locations where the effects of crisis are being felt and discussed : in the spaces of discussion or struggles (assemblies, publications, sites, occupations and also syndicates) and in the places of life and work (banlieues, schools, universities, companies). Under this view, there are simple truths never worthless to remember. First that the migrations have always existed and will always exist. The project intending to stop them can only produce « barbarous » and « inhuman » practices, unable to spur migration movements. Furthermore, it is obvious that even the deportation of all the « sans-papiers » will not bring back full-employment and would not provoke any rise of wages. Unemployment, as well as the reducing of wages and social rights, are never the result of the presence of migrants, they are an integrated part of the capitalist system. In other words, the movements of struggle against the European anti-social reforms will win nothing from an opposition against migrants. On the contra-

ry, finding the common between “migrants” and “natives”, managing to link all workers and unemployed, with or without papers, in a same process, ables to consider common discourses and actions.

During the « anti-CPE » movement in France in some cities, connections have been created between students, workers, migrants and banlieues inhabitants. These connections were notably expressed in the position-taking of student assemblies against the CESEDA law on migration, but also in the streets, during direct actions and confrontation with the cops. Of course, union directions, medias and politicians focused only on the criticism of CPE and on the raids of youngsters of the suburbs against demonstrators in Paris. They know what they have to lose from the connection between sub-urbans youth and resistance movement : the events of December 2008 in Greece and the NATO-Summit of Strasbourg are there to remember them. In contrary, we know what we have to win : an enlargement of theoretical and social criticism, and an augmentation of power. On this issue, one of the main challenge is to make social movements take position and action on the question of migration. But to make these connections, it is not enough to stay in the level of debates and ideas.

Manage to get revolts taking into account migrants situation implicates that migration and anti-racist themes are an integrated part of struggles. In this view, it is necessary that the actors assume their identity while implicating themselves in the movements against austerity-plans, it is necessary that effective solidarities are being created in the struggle. It is in an active and radical opposition against capitalist system, that bonding with the ones who are experiencing it and are putting it in question can take place. If this bonding can be realized in large movements, they can also develop in autonomous way by actions aiming at targets connected to capitalism and the crisis from anti-racism positions. Targets like financial or employers lobbies, governmental and economical institutions, banks or the European meeting of ministers of finance... It's definitively about to make practical the idea with which a profound transformation of migration policies can only pass by a putting in question the capitalist frame in which they take place.

In the perspective to enlarge the prospects of the No Border movement and of the movements against austerity-plans, in the perspective to augment our power, we are finding us in Brussels during the No Border camp. In fact, Brussels gathers at the same time the principal European institutions, hundreds of lobbies, financial groups and headquarters of multinationals, a big part of the Belgian governmental buildings and important migrant neighborhoods, which are vivid examples of gentrification and from time to time of revolts. This concentration of economical, financial, political and anti-migration institutions present a magnificent opportunity for us to show our presence and our force, to bring our arguments to the public place and to participate at the contestation of the capitalist world by using a diversity of our modes of action.

Enjoy Brussels!

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