

First Manifesto

Conferences

FOR **eco-socialism**

18 Theses on Eco-Socialism

February 2013

*"I want the vast majority - the only majority, that is: everyone - to be able to speak, read, listen, blossom and grow.
I've never understood struggle as anything other than a way to end harshness.
I took this path because I believe that it will lead us all to this permanent sweetness.
I'm fighting for this general, growing, inexhaustible goodness."*

Pablo Neruda, Chilean poet (*I Confess I Have Lived*, 1974)

This Manifesto of the Conferences for Eco-Socialism falls in line with the international Eco-Socialism Manifesto published in 2002 and the 2009 Eco-Socialist Declaration of Belem, to pave the way for a new political project.

It was subjected to a wide debate within the Conferences for Eco-Socialism organized by the Parti de Gauche on 1 December 2012. Since then, 133 core amendments, from over thirty authors of diverse backgrounds, have been received and processed.

The present synthesis is proposed to all - organisations as well as individuals in France and all over the world - who are interested in and identify with eco-socialism.

This "Manifesto for Eco-Socialism" will be discussed throughout the year and will lead to new debates on the occasion of the second round of Conferences on Eco-Socialism to be held in December 2013 within the framework of the Committee of Conferences composed of the following persons: Mathieu Agostini, Paul Ariès, Guillaume Etievant, Laurent Garrouste, Susan George, Janette Habel, Damien Joliton, Matthieu le Quang, Jacques Lerichomme, Michael Löwy, Laurent Maffeis, Corinne Morel Darleux, Arno Munster, Danièle Obono, Anita Rozenholc....

All information concerning the permanent Conferences on Eco-Socialism can be found at ecosocialisme.com

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I. WHAT IS ECO-SOCIALISM?

1. A concrete and radical alternative. Eco-Socialism is not a utopia with which reality should comply. It is the reasoned human answer to the double impasse in which humanity is now locked because of the modes of production and consumption of our times which are exhausting human beings and the environment. This calls for radical thinking and political action, in the sense that we must go to the root causes. We are thus fighting the two driving forces of the current system: capitalism and productivism. Capitalism imposes the commodification of everything for new sources of profit. It is therefore responsible for widening the gap in social inequality and for the ongoing globalisation, liberal and destructive of liberty. Social and environmental dumping prevail, with the relocation of pollution and damage to ecosystems. Productivism (seeking ever greater production) depletes natural resources and disrupts the climate. The consumerist ideology is its corollary. It raises material accumulation to the rank of a law, with big publicity stunts to generate needs which can never be satisfied. We point at the real culprits of that system: the global financial oligarchy, governments subjected to multinational lobbies without democratic control, ideologists of “free and undistorted” competition, green capitalism and free trade. On the other side, eco-socialism is an alternative to overcome the crisis and pose human interest as a priority: sharing wealth without delay, founding a new economy based on real needs and the moderation of consumption, preserving the climate, the ecosystem and its biodiversity.

2. A paradigm of general interest. In reality, human beings are an integral part of the ecosystem in which they live, even before they have started thinking about it. The two cannot be separated. There is only one global ecosystem compatible with human life. Therefore, we are all alike in our dependence on the ecosystem. This truth applies to everyone, despite all our differences. There is thus a human interest which is linked to that of all the other species: the protection of the ecosystem that makes human life possible. How can we identify it other than by free collective deliberation? And how can it be free if some dominate others, if revealed truths are imposed first? The environmentalist paradigm calls for democracy, social equality, secularism and feminism. These are the essential conditions for public debate to take place without oligarchic, dogmatic or patriarchal intrusion. Finally, in the discussion to determine the general human interest, it is for each of us to say not what is good for him or herself, but what is good for all. This establishes the universality of human rights, citizenship as a duty and the Republic as a necessity. Such is the reasoned link that unites political ecology and the universal social Republic. It is this global political theory that we call eco-socialism. It is about humanism and about a socialist and concrete universalism.

3. A new political synthesis of the Left. Eco-socialism is a new political project unifying a necessarily anti-capitalist ecology and a socialism freed from the logic of productivism (that is the false need to produce and consume ever more). It allows the junction of the main currents of the Left into a new political paradigm. We need this as an alternative project of society to capitalism. It draws a perspective in the struggle for a society of emancipation and progress in which the destruction of the environment and the exploitation of man by man will be wiped out. Our eco-socialist project takes into account human needs and the limitations of our planet. It gives new thinking to the social utility of production, the way in which we consume, our real needs, the purpose of what we produce and how we produce it.



4. The renewal of socialism. Socialism has always sought the emancipation of the human being. This implies the sharing of wealth, the democratisation of power and global education of every man and woman. This programme remains our programme. But we now know that emancipation can not be achieved through endless growth: the ecosystem that makes human life possible does not allow for it. This observation requires us to define a new model of progress which breaks with the capitalist system. The system of production and exchange needs to be reassessed, but also the contents of production and consumption patterns. Therefore this approach involves the whole social and political organisation. It forces us to think in a new way of what human progress really means in the context of the preservation of the ecosystem. Accordingly, we propose a new set of liberating strategies for the future of humanity.

II. THE WAY OUT OF IDEOLOGICAL IMPASSES

5. The lie of green capitalism, and the risk of “apolitical environmentalism”. Our ecology is social. It continues the historical battles of the Left. We reject the deception of a vision of ecology which would make it compatible with liberal economics. We denounce “green capitalism”, which under the guise of sustainable development provides a new space to the search for maximum profits, feeds imperialist dynamics and short-term visions. We reject “conservationist” positions that simply put the blame on individuals, thus refraining from highlighting the major responsibility of unbridled productivism. Such positions turn away from the fight against capitalist modes of production and consumption and refuse to acknowledge that they exploit the most vulnerable and plunder developing countries. We reject that kind of drawing-room ecology cut off from the working classes, devoid of a serious critical approach of the global economy and of a social vision, and therefore also devoid of environmental efficiency. Our ecology addresses environmental issues by systematically linking them with criticism of the economic system and social struggles, and by involving all citizens.

6. The social democratic impasse. We reject the social democratic doctrine according to which any redistribution of wealth should depend on a prior boost of the GDP and on increased overall material consumption. This is double nonsense. On the one hand, it maintains the power of financial capital and assumes that the distribution of wealth is based on “the benefits of growth.” It does not tackle the accumulation already acquired. But we know that wealth is there, and we don’t need to wait to redistribute it. What is at stake is the hoarding of this wealth by capitalistic plundering. On the other hand, the social democratic doctrine is based on a model of infinite growth which is suicidal for human civilization. GDP is a measurement which does not reflect “good living”. It is of course imperative that every human being have access to basic commodities. Of course, stimulating activities of general interest is also essential. However, boosting blind economic growth is not the answer to social emergencies. It is even less bearable or desirable from the point of view of preserving the ecosystem, the natural resources and the climate. Therefore we hope neither for the resumption of growth, nor for the beneficial effects of austerity. We believe in neither.



III. SETTING UP A NEW POLITICAL ECONOMY SERVING HUMAN PROGRESS

7. Putting the economy at the service of the people's needs. Eco-socialism wants to put the economic and productive systems at the service of human needs. In this it opposes the “supply-side policies” advocated by Liberals. We reject this productivist logic which consists in producing everything and anything under any condition simply in order to sell on the market by massive spending on advertising. It is obvious that with such an objective, and in order to raise profits, the system is selling us products programmed to break down or become obsolete sooner and sooner. How much longer must we put up with our civilization's ever-rising pile of waste? How can we turn a blind eye on the fact that much of this waste is exported to the countries of the South to the detriment of their peoples' health and their environment? On the contrary our collective decisions must instead be guided by the satisfaction of our real needs. This is the meaning of ecological planning. It reverses the logic by being based on real needs, on our duty to preserve the ecosystem and the right of all to live in a healthy environment. It makes the productive system compatible with those requirements.

8. Breaking with traditional thought patterns. Eco-socialism challenges the dictatorship of vested interests and of the private ownership of the means of production. It questions the relationship to work. We advocate social ownership of the means of production and alternative proposals for social economy in terms of self-management and cooperatives. We uphold fiscal sovereignty and nationalisation as tools of public policy, particularly in the fields of banking and credit. Indexation of human progress, de-globalisation and social and ecological protectionism, basic income guarantee, socialized salaries, and maximum allowed income are among the many perspectives we have in mind to get off the beaten tracks and to avoid the trap of lending support to the system. We must also go further in drastically reducing working time, by “working less and working better, with work for all”, and by setting full employment as our goal while reassessing the finality of work. There is no point in working longer than necessary to produce what we need. The time thus freed could be usefully allocated to activities now considered as “unproductive”, which are nevertheless essential to “good living”.

9. Producing differently. The complete overhaul of our system of production is based on what we call the “4 R's”: relocalisation of activity, ecological re-industrialization, restructuring of industrial facilities and redistribution of work. Many needs remain unsatisfied: in a restructured industry, in personal services, in agroecology, in farming aimed at food sovereignty and health for all, in research and the “green” sectors working at reducing our dependence on non-renewable resources (such as green building, energy efficiency, thermal renovation of housing, renewable energies). With rising unemployment and the social crisis, the need to create or preserve jobs is too often put forward against the imperative of environmental protection. It is absurd. Here is one of the economic and social costs of liberal laissez-faire policies. On the contrary, relocation and ecological transition would allow to preserve, transform or create many jobs, both local and sustainable, in all countries.

10. Setting up the “green rule” as our political compass. The “green rule” is our central indicator of economic management. It replaces the “golden rule” of austerity policies and of “structural adjustment” imposed by the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the European Commission and the European Central Bank. It aims at ensuring our responsibility to humanity and its ecosystem by phasing out the ecological debt. It combines the need to reduce the consumption of certain material commodities and the necessary boosting of other activities, their resulting ecological footprint being systematically taken into account. The damage already done by the emission of greenhouse gases and the



loss of biodiversity must be made good. In addition, pushing back every year the “ecological debt day” will be adopted as a means of evaluating public policies. This is the date when an amount of renewable resources equal to what the planet is able to regenerate has been used on a worldwide scale, and when the amount of waste it is able to “digest” has been reached. Our goal is to push it back to December 31, that is to say, to neutralize our ecological footprint. This implies drastically reducing the emission of greenhouse gases and also phasing out nuclear energy, which produces unmanageable radioactive waste and carries unacceptable risks to humans as well as to the ecosystem.

IV. BUILDING THE ECO-SOCIALIST REVOLUTION

11. Our struggles have to converge. Our goal of a civilization break requires that the largest number of people be implied in political action. It is a question of gathering and acting together, and not simply of being in the right among those holding similar views, or worse still, of setting the ones against the others. We stand alongside the workers and those left out by the system who are fighting for alternative social and environmental projects. Ecological restructuring cannot be achieved without them, much less against them. Our opponents in this radical change of course of society are not the researchers or the workers of industry, but the banks, the multinational corporations and the shareholders who are steering all production patterns according to their private interests and not according to the general interest.

12. Struggling and resisting to reinvent. The eco-socialist revolution combines programme proposals and a presence in social and environmental struggles, alongside all those who continue to resist. The citizens involved in this project play a part in the development of practical experiments and alternatives: local distribution networks, associations for the maintenance of small-scale peasant agriculture, support for out-of-town food crop farming, actions against the urbanization of farmland, transition town networks, takeover of companies by employees, local exchange systems, responsible saving and complementary currencies, collective housing and carpooling. They are active in actions of nonviolent civil disobedience, such as actions against advertising or requisitions of empty housing. Elected representatives of the people for the eco-socialist project are committed to a consistent approach between what they say and what they do. For example they revitalise the left by taking steps to ban advertising, to bring utilities back into public management, to overtax wasteful consumption, or to extend free access to public services.

13. Implementing environmental planning. Environmental planning requires the taking into account of the long term as well as public leadership, all placed under the control of citizens, workers and consumers. The problem is not industry, research or the technology in themselves, but the lack of choice and control by citizens. A citizens’ revolution is needed to conquer this capacity of control. Such is the explosive mixture of revolutionary utopianism and technical expertise to which we aspire. The Ecological Plan gives us the possibility of charting a new course toward another mode of development, by questioning our needs and reorienting production, exchanges and consumption along our social and ecological values. The research sector must be reorganized around general interests and real needs, and invent new forms of participation, for example through citizens’ conventions. Government schools must work at rising the general level of knowledge and skills for all ages through professional and general education in order to support this change of course and pave the way for the emergence of new activities. “Conferences of popular participation” must be set up to redefine the criteria of social and environmental usefulness and the working links between the various levels of policy-making, from the European Union to



local authorities. Environmental planning promotes the continuing involvement of staff in corporate governance, in line with the growing convergence of social and environmental struggles.

14. Without a Constituent Assembly, Equality and a Social Republic remain impossible!

We affirm the need for a high level of common culture through the public school system, including environmental education. How else can we achieve individual and collective emancipation, which alone can pave the way to consent for a social contract shared by all? The eco-socialist project reaffirms the role of the state, the community and public services, who are essential in planning the civilization break, build a liberating society and ensure equal access to fundamental rights for everyone, everywhere. These must be redrafted by means of a constituent assembly. It will have to renew the institutions from top to bottom, and set up the democratic ways and means which will ensure a permanent involvement of the citizens and the people's sovereignty in all areas. For the revolutionary task is huge. Indeed we support the establishment of a system of "care" for town and country which runs counter to urban sprawl, the concentration of populations in huge cities and organized competition between territories. We advocate a new form of urbanism that brings together those functions essential to "good living" (public services of health and education, housing, work, culture and leisure, biodiversity, and peasant farming). We refuse the commodification of living things, and GMOs, as well as of common assets such as water, energy and knowledge, and the privatisation of public services. These must come under public management by rethinking the working relationship between the state, the guarantor of republican equality, local authorities and the action of citizens, trade unions, associations and users.

15. Fighting the cultural battle The eco-socialist project leads its ideological struggle through popular education. It wants to decolonise the imagination. It denounces the programming of a docile individual-consumer, submitted to the opinions of so-called experts and to the requirements of productivism which make us yearn for harmful and useless products, made at the other end of the world in shameful working conditions and under inadequate or nonexistent environmental legislation. It fights the armed wing of productivism: advertising, with its attendant commercialisation of the body and sexism, fashion and the media, relayed by credit institutions which condition us and subject us to a permanent incitement to buy and waste. This ideological battle is also a battle of words. We reject the politics of the oxymoron and neo-liberal "newspeak": the "price of labour" which becomes a "cost", social security contributions re-classified as "burdens", "police forces" renamed "law enforcement", "video surveillance" masquerading as "video protection" or nuclear energy disguised as "clean and carbon-free".

16. Blasting away the obstacles of liberal treaties. On a global scale, we denounce the agreements pushed forward by the World Trade Organization: free trade agreements and economic partnership agreements which contribute to the depletion of natural resources, the exploitation of the peoples of the South and social dumping in the developed countries. Because the European Union is the first economic zone in the world, its evolution influences the whole planet. Its neo-liberal policies are guarded by the existing treaties and austerity plans. Established under the leadership of economic and financial lobbies, these all aim at the disappearance of public services, the extension of private commercial interests and free trade. This is a source of waste due to mercantile competition and the destruction of public services and common wealth, all for the benefit of private interests. Liberal and austerity policies in Europe also make it impossible to control and steer production and exchanges towards objectives of human progress. Under these conditions, we maintain that an eco-socialist policy in Europe requires disobedience to neo-liberal Europe and its directives. To achieve this it is necessary to build another balance of power between citizens, financial power and the anti-democratic institutions of



the European Union. While the European Union may be considered a relevant scale for wide-range environmental and social policies, their implementation will only be made possible by the construction of another Europe, under the democratic control of the people.

17. Carrying out an international and universal struggle. There is only one ecosystem compatible with human life. Therefore we have to take this into account in all areas. Decisions taken on one side on the planet have repercussions everywhere else. The eco-socialist project implies the recognition of the responsibility of the countries of the “North”, the World Trade Organization, the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, towards the peoples of the “South”. The eco-socialist project denounces organised competition rather than cooperation, productivism and its nefarious effects on global climate, the plundering of natural resources, the race for arable land, as well as the austerity measures imposed by the Troika. It also implies the recognition of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and the creation of an international tribunal for crimes against the environment. Eco-socialism requires us to contribute to the debate linking policies for development and social progress with environmental protection. To this end, we support and take our inspiration from alternative policies or events abroad: citizens’ revolutions, the Arab Spring, the refusal of the debt and of media monopolies in Argentina, the Constituent Assembly in Iceland and Venezuela, the Yasuni ITT initiative to leave oil underground in Ecuador, etc. The knowledge, experience and methods learned in those situations must converge. The eco-socialist project must be supported by a global forum that will make it the goal of the citizens’ revolution for our time.

18. A citizens’ revolution to lead the way for eco-socialism. Given the scale of our objective, setting a new course away from the capitalist model of productivism cannot come from a simple electoral changeover or from decisions dictated from above. It implies a radical overhaul of institutions, including elections with proportional representation, gender parity and an end to one person holding many offices, which will allow people to be adequately represented in their diversity. What is at stake is bringing the oligarchy to heel and ensuring popular sovereignty through real democracy under all circumstances. This requires that the eco-socialist parliamentary majorities combine their efforts with popular movements involved in all domains of life in society. This reclaiming of political and civic initiatives by every man and woman, in order to determine where the general interest lies, everywhere and on every issue, is what we call the citizens’ revolution. It is a revolution, because it intends to change the forms of ownership, the institutional system and the hierarchy of legal, social and environmental standards which organize both society and the economy. And it is a citizens’ revolution, because it intends to empower every person, not in the interest of a particular social category but for the good of all humans, and because it provides institutional forms for itself and submits to universal suffrage within the framework of political pluralism. We refuse to accept that despair and anger turn into hatred. We want neither an enlightened avant-garde, nor a green dictatorship, nor ethnocentric insularity; we support the democratic path of the citizens’ revolution. People are not the problem, they are the solution. The worst damage that could be wrought by the current crisis would be that humanity proved unable to open itself up to a new future. Eco-socialism can be that new future. Let it blossom!

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