

level that actions purporting to produce effects can and must be targeted. Second, if they are to go beyond mere “happenings,” symbolically efficacious but temporary and discontinuous, these actions must be based on a *concentration of already concentrated social forces*, that is, on a confluence of social movements that already exist throughout Europe. Informed by theoretical work aimed at formulating realistic political and social objectives for a genuine social Europe (such as the replacement of the European Commission by a genuine executive responsible to a parliament elected by universal suffrage), these collective actions, carried out through the coordination of a collective, must work to constitute a credible counterpower. They must, that is, work to create a “unified” or “coordinated” European social movement (thus the singular), capable, by its mere existence, of bringing into existence a European political space that currently does not exist.

*Paris, July 2000–January 2001*

*For a European Social Movement\**

It is no easy matter when speaking of Europe merely to make yourself heard. The journalistic field, which filters, intercepts, and interprets all public statements in terms of its most typical logic, that of “all or nothing,” strives to force everyone into the mindless choice imposed on all those who remain trapped within that logic: you are either “for” Europe, that is to say, progressive, open, modern, liberal, or “not for” Europe—in which case you condemn yourself to being thought of as archaic, outdated, reactionary, and nationalist, if not pro-Le Pen and even anti-Semitic. As if there were no other legitimate option but the unconditional endorsement of Europe *as it is*, a Europe reduced to a central bank and a single currency, and subjected to the rule of unfettered competition. But it would be a mistake to think that one really escapes this crude alternative as soon as one speaks of a “social Europe.” Discourses on “social Europe” have so far failed to be translated in any significant way into concrete norms governing the daily life of citizens in matters of work, health, housing, retirement, etc. Meanwhile the directives on competition are overturning daily the supply of goods and services and are rapidly undoing

\* This article first appeared in *Le Monde diplomatique*, June 1999.

national public services—not even to mention how the European central bank can conduct its policy outside of any democratic debate. One can draw up a “social” charter and at the same time combine wage austerity, the reduction of social rights, the repression of protest movements, and the like. *European construction currently amounts to social destruction.* Those who put up these rhetorical smoke screens, such as the French socialists, are merely raising to a higher degree of ambiguity the strategies of political equivocation of British-style “social liberalism,” that barely made-over Thatcherism that relies, to sell itself, on the opportunistic exploitation of the symbolics of socialism recycled for mere media consumption. This way, the social democrats currently in power in Europe are able to collaborate, in the name of monetary stability and budgetary rigor, to the sacking of the most admirable conquests of the social struggles of the past two centuries—universalism, egalitarianism (by making Jesuitical distinctions between equality and equity), and internationalism—and to the destruction of the very essence of the socialist idea or ideal, that is to say, broadly put, the ambition to protect or reconstruct through collective and organized action the *solidarities* threatened by the play of economic forces.

The almost simultaneous accession of social democrats to the leadership of several European countries has opened up a real opportunity for them to conceive and carry out a genuine social policy together. Is it not sadly significant that, at this very moment, it does not even occur to them to explore the paths of specifically political actions that are thus open to them in matters of taxation but also in the areas of employment, trade, labor law, training, or social housing? Is it not amazing and revealing that they do not even try to give themselves the means

to effectively thwart the already well-advanced process of dismantlement of social rights embodied by the welfare state, for example by establishing within the European zone common social standards with regard to the minimum wage (rationally modulated across countries), working hours, or vocational training for young people? Is it not shocking that they hurry on the contrary to gather and foster the freewheeling operation of the “financial markets,” rather than control them by measures such as the institution of an international taxation of capital, particularly of short-term, speculative movements of capital (only included yesterday in their electoral platforms), or the reconstruction of a monetary system capable of ensuring stable relations between economies? And is it not surprising that the power to veto social policies, which is granted, outside of all democratic control, to the “guardians of the Euro” (tacitly identified with Europe), forbids the funding of a major public program of economic and social development based on the proactive establishment of a coherent set of European framework laws, especially in the fields of education, health, and social protection? This would lead to the creation of transnational institutions that would gradually substitute, in part at least, for the national or regional bureaucracies that the logic of a strictly monetary and commercial unification condemns to enter into perverse competition with each other.

Given the preponderant part played by intra-European trade in the foreign exchanges of the different countries of Europe, the governments of these countries could implement a common policy aimed at least at limiting the effects of intra-European competition and at mounting collective resistance to the non-European nations—particularly to American injunctions, which often do not conform to the rules of pure

and perfect competition they are supposed to safeguard. They could do this instead of invoking the specter of "globalization" to put through (in the name of international competition) the regressive social program that big business has unremittingly promoted, by word and deed, since the mid-1970s: less state intervention, more mobility and "flexibility" of labor (with the pluralization and casualization of employment, the curtailing of union rights, and greater freedom to fire), public aid for private investment through tax policy, the lowering of employers' social security contributions, etc. In short, by doing just about nothing to actualize the policy they profess, even as all the conditions for implementing it are present, these governments clearly betray the fact that they do not really want such a policy.

Social history teaches that there is no social policy without a social movement capable of imposing it and that it was not the market, as some would have us believe today, but the labor movement that "civilized" the market economy while greatly contributing to its effectiveness. Consequently, for all those who genuinely wish to oppose a social Europe to the Europe of the banks and money—flanked by a police and penitentiary Europe (which is already far advanced) and a military Europe (a probable consequence of intervention in Kosovo)—the question is how to mobilize the forces capable of achieving that end and which bodies to call on to carry out this work of mobilization. The European Trade Union Confederation comes to mind. But no one can contradict the specialists, such as Corinne Gobin, who have shown how that body behaves first and foremost as a "partner," desirous of playing its part, with dignity and propriety, in the management of European affairs by carrying out well-tempered lobbying in the spirit of

"dialogue" so dear to Jacques Delors. And one cannot deny that it has done little to give itself the means to effectively countervail the desiderata of employers (themselves grouped into UNICE, the Union of Industrial and Employers' Confederations of Europe, and endowed with a powerful lobbying organization capable of dictating its will in Brussels) and to impose genuine collective agreements on a European scale through the use of the normal weapons of social struggle (strikes, demonstrations, etc.).

Since we cannot, at least in the short term, wait for the European Trade Union Confederation to espouse a resolutely militant unionism, we must turn, first and provisionally, to the national trade unions. At the same time we must not overlook the formidable obstacles to the veritable *conversion* that they would have to effect in order to avoid technocratic-diplomatic temptations at the European level, and at the national level the routines and forms of thinking that tend to enclose them within the boundaries of a single country. And this at a moment when, under the impact of, among other things, neoliberal policies and economic forces left to run free (with the privatization of many large state enterprises and the proliferation of casual jobs, most often in the service sector and hence temporary and part time), the very foundations of trade union activism are under threat, as attested to not merely by the decline in unionization but also by the low rate of participation of young people and especially of youth from immigrant families, who elicit so much concern but whom no one seriously thinks of mobilizing on this front.

European trade unionism, which could be the engine of a social Europe, thus remains to be invented, and it will be invented only at the cost of a whole series of more or less radical

breaks. We need to break first with the national if not nationalistic particularisms of trade union traditions, that are always confined within the limits of the states from which they expect a large proportion of the resources essential to their existence and that circumscribe the terrain and define the stakes of their claims and actions. Next we need to break with an attitude of conciliation, which tends to discredit critical thought and action and to valorize social consensus to the point of encouraging trade unions to share responsibility for a policy aimed at making the dominated accept their subordination. We must forsake also the economic fatalism fostered not only by the reigning political-journalistic discourse on the inescapable necessities of "globalization" and the rule of the financial markets (behind which political leaders like to conceal their freedom of choice) but also by the very conduct of social democratic governments, which, by extending or adapting the policy of conservative governments, make this policy appear as the only possible one, and which attempt to give deregulation measures complicit with business demands the appearance of invaluable achievements of a genuine social policy. We must break, finally, with a neoliberalism skilled in presenting the inflexible demands of one-sided employment contracts under the trappings of "flexibility" (as, for example, with negotiations on the reduction of working hours and the French law on the thirty-five-hour week, which exploit all the objective ambiguities of a balance of forces made increasingly unequal by the generalization of job precariousness and by the inertia of a state that is more inclined to ratify that imbalance than help remedy it).

This renewed trade unionism would call for mobilizing agents animated by a profoundly internationalist spirit and ca-

pable of overcoming the obstacles linked to national juridical and administrative traditions, as well as the social barriers internal to each country—those that separate the different occupational sectors and categories, but also divisions of gender, age, and ethnic origin. It is paradoxical indeed that young people, particularly from immigrant families, who are so obsessively present in the collective phantasms of social fear engendered and sustained by the dialectic of political competition for xenophobic votes and the media competition for audience ratings, occupy in the concerns of progressive parties and trade unions a place inversely proportional to the place they are granted throughout Europe in the discourse of "law and order" and the policies it promotes. We should look to, or hope for, the formation of a veritable International of "immigrants" from all countries—Turks, Kabyles, Moroccans, Surinamese, and others—to engage in transnational action, in association with the native workers of the different European countries, against the dominant economic forces that, through various mediations, are also responsible for their emigration. These youth, whom we stubbornly insist on calling "immigrants," currently have no way out other than resigned submission (sometimes preached to them under the label of "integration"), petty delinquency or criminal careers, or that modern form of peasant revolt that are the riots that periodically rock the social housing estates of the urban periphery. European societies would in fact have much to gain if these youths ceased to be the passive objects of "law and order" measures and became active agents of an innovative and constructive social movement. The reintegration of "immigrants" into the social movement should be the first step toward a transnational politics.

But we must also ponder a whole range of measures (no doubt scattered and disparate) to develop in each citizen the internationalist dispositions that now are the precondition for all effective strategies of resistance. Among them are the creation of a European trade union college; the bolstering within every trade union organization of departments specifically set up to deal with organizations in other nations and responsible in particular for gathering and disseminating international information; the progressive establishment of rules for coordinating trade union action on wages, working conditions, and terms of employment (in order to fight the temptation to accept agreements on moderating wage demands or, as in some British companies, to give up the right to strike); the creation of coordinating committees between the trade unions of different industries, on the pattern of those that already exist in transport (rail and road); the strengthening, within multinational firms, of international works committees capable of resisting the fragmenting pressures from central management; the promotion of policies of recruitment and mobilization among immigrants so as to transform them from pawns in the strategies of parties into agents of resistance and change, so that they would no longer be used within progressive organizations themselves to sow division and incite regression toward nationalistic or even racist thinking. Measures could also be introduced to recognize and institutionalize new forms of mobilization and action, such as grassroots " coordinations " (which have played a major role in recent social upheavals in France) and the establishment of links of active cooperation between unions in the private and public sectors, which have very different weights from one country to another. Further measures could be adopted to effect that "conversion of

minds" (inside and outside unions) necessary to break with the narrow definition of "the social," reduced to the world of wage work closed unto itself, to link claims about work to demands in matters of health, housing, transport, training, leisure, and gender relations, and to launch drives to unionize sectors traditionally bereft of mechanisms of collective protection (services, temporary work).

But an objective as visibly utopian as the *construction of a unified European trade union confederation* remains indispensable. Such a project is no doubt essential to inspire and guide the collective search for the innumerable transformations in collective institutions and the thousands of conversions of individual dispositions that will be required to "make" the European social movement. There is indeed no requirement for the construction of such a movement more essential than the repudiation of all our habitual ways of conceiving trade unionism, social movements, and national differences in these areas. There is no task more urgent than the invention of novel ways of thinking and acting forced upon us by the casualization of employment. Generalized precariousness, which is the basis of a new form of social discipline generated by job insecurity and the fear of unemployment, which now affect even the best-placed workers, can be the basis for solidarities of a new kind, both in scope and in principle. This can be the case particularly in the event of those crises seen as especially scandalous when they take the form of mass layoffs by profitable firms which impose them in order to generate yet higher returns for their shareholders. The new trade unionism will have to learn to rely on new solidarities among the victims of the policy of job insecurity, who today are found almost as often among occupations requiring a high level of cultural capital, such as

teaching, the health care professions, and communications (as with journalists), as among clerks and blue-collar workers. But it will first have to work to produce and disseminate as widely as possible a critical analysis of all the strategies, often very subtle, in which certain actions of social democratic governments collaborate, sometimes unwittingly. The fact that these ambiguous strategies of the new mode of domination are themselves very often implemented, at all levels of the social hierarchy, by victims of similar strategies makes this analysis all the more difficult to conduct and, particularly, to convey to all those whom it wishes to arm so that they may gain a clear view of their condition. One thinks for example of precariously employed teachers, overburdened with marginalized high school or university students who are themselves destined for casual work; or of social workers with no stable status, entrusted to guide and assist populations whose social condition is not far removed from their own, all of whom are inclined to embrace and spread shared illusions.

Only a rational utopia such as that which would offer the hope of a true social Europe could provide the trade unions with the mass base of grassroots activists they currently lack and could encourage or force them to jettison the short-term corporatist interests that arise in the competition for the best position in the existing market of trade union services and benefits. Only the universalistic voluntarism of a social movement capable of transcending the limits of the traditional organizations, in particular by fully integrating the movement of the unemployed, would be able effectively to fight and thwart economic and financial powers at the international level at which they now exert their rule. Recent international movements, of which the European Marches Against Unemploy-

ment are only the most exemplary, are no doubt the first, as yet fleeting, sign of the collective discovery, within the social movement and beyond, of the vital need for internationalism or, more precisely, for the internationalization of modes of thinking and forms of action.