

The Myths of the Elites and the Reformist Left about the European Union*

TAKIS FOTOPOULOS

At the end of March, in Berlin, the European elites celebrated the Golden Jubilee of the establishment – through the 1957 Treaty of Rome – of the European Economic Community/European Union (EEC/EU), which today covers most of the European continent (apart from Russia). The elites, together with the mass media controlled by them, used this occasion to try to persuade their "subjects", through a series of myths, that they should feel better being inside, rather than outside, the Union – even though the most prosperous European countries, i.e., Norway and Switzerland, happen to be outside it!

It is, however, worth noting that the European elites had the nerve to celebrate the union of markets and capital which they euphemistically call the "union of peoples", despite:

- The repeated rejections by plebiscite of their attempts to introduce a European Constitution which would institutionalise neoliberal globalisation in Europe^[1]. At the Jubilee celebrations, no less, they decided to re-introduce the basic arrangements of the ill-fated constitution with some decorative amendments, through the back door and with no referenda this time.
- The growing indignation of peoples all over the Euro zone because of the increasing inequality brought about by the introduction of the Euro in combination with the neoliberal policies (due to be further enhanced by the new Franco-German-British axis that is expected to emerge, whatever the outcome of the forthcoming French General Election) which have already led to mass unemployment (particularly in France and Germany), and underemployment (particularly in Britain where unemployment is disguised as part-time and occasional employment).
- The explosion of anger among young people, last year in France^[2] and this year in Greece^[3], and also among wider social strata, due to the privatisation of education and social security, flexible labour markets and the general de-structuring of the welfare state.
- The surplus of indignation at the contempt shown for the will of the European peoples through the complicity of the European elites with the American elite in the transnational elite's attacks on Yugoslavia^[4], Afghanistan^[5] and Iraq.^[6]
- The fact that the integration of countries at unequal levels of development within the same union has had –as was predicted by many economists– adverse economic effects on the less developed parts of the European Union, which has led to an effective de-structuring of their productive structures. This has happened in Greece, for instance,^[7] where the unemployment rate has more than doubled since the time before integration, while the trade deficit has exploded.

The main myth promoted by the European elites,^[8] which is also repeated by the European reformist Left,^[9] - is that the establishment of the European Economic Community/European Union has put an end to war between European nations. As *The Independent* put it in an article covering its entire front page: "The fact that the two world wars that shaped the last century now seem so remote is, in itself, tribute to a visionary project that has permanently changed the landscape".^[10] The fact, however, that the elites and the reformist Left seem to "forget", is that peace among advanced capitalist countries is a necessary condition for successful globalisation, since open markets between states at war with each other are, of course, inconceivable. This is why the first attempt at the creation of a self-regulated internationalised market in the 19th century, in fact, led to an even longer period of peace, the "Hundred Years' peace" (1815-1914).^[11] Of course, this "peace" stopped neither social insurrection, of which there were several, nor various wars between advanced capitalist countries and countries in the "South" – exactly as is the case today.

The "peace" before the First World War, and the present one, share a fundamental characteristic: the freedom of movement both of capital and commodities, which was justified, then, under the ideological cover of liberalism and, today, under that of neoliberalism.^[12] However, there is a crucial difference between the first attempt to create a self-regulated global economy and the present one, which could also explain the collapse of the former: the fact that the first attempt did not, and could not, lead to the universalisation of open and liberalised markets for commodities and capital. The reason for this was that such a universalisation was simply not feasible in an era in which large colonial powers like England and France had divided significant areas of the globe between themselves, completely controlling their markets, at the expense of the emerging non-colonial powers (mainly the U.S.A.) and the smaller colonial powers (e.g. Germany)^[13]. Therefore, the failure of globalisation was, at that stage, inevitable, particularly since the economic elites at the time were clearly national, in contrast to the present situation in which a new transnational elite^[14] has emerged, with a common aim/interest in developing an essentially self-regulated global market.

Clearly, the process which led to the present globalisation (and consequently the long period of peace between the members of the transnational elite), is hardly related to the establishment of the EEC/EU, which was basically a defensive act by European capital to secure its survival in the post-war era of US economic hegemony. The rest, i.e., the discourse about a political union, a "peoples' Europe" etc., were merely the ideological justifications for this attempt. The foundations of today's globalisation were laid down about ten years before the creation of the EEC/EU, when American hegemony established, at the 1944 Bretton Woods Conference, a new system of international economic relations which, through the institutions it set up (the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and, particularly, the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade – to be succeeded by the World Trade Organisation in 1995) aimed mainly to bring about the continuous opening up, and later the liberalisation, of world markets. In fact, the achievement of this aim was the necessary and sufficient condition for the subsequent development of transnational corporations, which control world production and trade today. The motive of American capital was not, of course, an altruistic one for peace, but one emanating from the full knowledge of its superior productiveness, which did not require the old colonial system for the conquest of new markets, since open and liberalised markets, combined with representative "democracy", provided an adequate institutional framework for the

establishment of American economic hegemony. This could also go a long way in explaining the anti-colonial and supposedly freedom-based nature of this hegemony.

The natural barrier to this economic integration was of course the Soviet bloc, and once again, it was economic mechanisms that were used to cause its collapse.^[15] On the other hand, the EEC/EU was always considered by the US elite to be a useful tool in the suppression of antisystemic movements in the West during the Cold war.^[16] The collapse of Western social democracy and the present neoliberal/social-liberal consensus were, therefore, the inevitable consequences of the above developments, as well as of parallel technological and social developments, which led to radical class restructuring in advanced capitalist countries.^[17] So, if one takes into account how the interests of the economic and political elites, which constitute the transnational elite, are interwoven in today's internationalised market economy, it is inconceivable indeed that "Europe" could somehow return to the social democratic era and to an international "social" market, as the reformist Left still seems to believe.

Similarly, it is an indication of today's degradation of the Left intelligentsia^[18] that the only contradiction it saw in the EU elites' jubilee was that "we Europeans celebrate this weekend while on a continent some few miles south of us the most defenceless, dispossessed and weak are murdered in Sudan". By implication, there was nothing contradictory in the fact that thousands of "the most defenceless, dispossessed and weak" were being murdered a few thousand miles to the East, as a direct or indirect consequence of the occupation of Afghanistan and Iraq by EU, as well as US and other, forces! This is why all that this same Left intelligentsia could think of as a solution to what it presumably saw as the main contradiction today, was a demand (in full agreement with the peoples' liberators, Bush and Blair!) "to impose immediately the most stringent sanctions upon the leaders of the Sudanese regime". Strangely enough, they could not find a single word to say about the need to impose "the most stringent sanctions" upon the leaders of the Israeli regime as well, which has continued its physical and economic strangulation of the Palestinian people undisturbed for so long, purely because they refuse to submit to the will of the EU, the US and the Zionist elites, and have continued to utter the forbidden word (being under a brutal occupation): resistance!

* The above text is based on an article which was first published in the fortnightly column of Takis Fotopoulos in the mass circulation Athens daily *Eleftherotypia* on 31/3/2007

[1] See T. Fotopoulos, "[The European Constitution and the Left](#)", *The International Journal of Inclusive Democracy*, Vol. 1, No. 4 (July 2005).

[2] See T. Fotopoulos, "[France: The revolt of the victims of neoliberal globalization](#)", *The International Journal of Inclusive Democracy* Vol. 2, No. 4 (November 2006).

[3] See T. Fotopoulos, "The Struggle Against the Privatisation of Education in Greece" (in this issue).

[4] See T. Fotopoulos, "[Milosevic and the distortion of the history of Yugoslavia's dismembering](#)", *The International Journal of INCLUSIVE DEMOCRACY*, Vol. 2, No. 4, (November 2006).

- [5] T. Fotopoulos, "[The global 'war' of the transnational elite](#)", *Democracy & Nature*, Vol. 8, No. 2 (July 2002).
- [6] T. Fotopoulos, "[Iraq: the new criminal 'war' of the transnational elite](#)", *Democracy & Nature*, Vol. 9, No. 2 (July 2003).
- [7] See e.g. Takis Fotopoulos, "[Economic restructuring and the debt problem: the Greek case](#)", *International Review of Applied Economics*, vol. 6, no. 1 (1992).
- [8] See the 'Declaration of Berlin' by the EU leaders on 25/3/2007.
- [9] See the Memorandum by Oscar Lafontain and Gregor Gizi for an alternative European Constitution (29/11/2006).
- [10] 'So, what has Europe ever done for us? Apart from...', *The Independent* (21 March 2007).
- [11] Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation* (Boston: Beacon Press 1944/1957), ch 1.
- [12] See T. Fotopoulos, *Towards An Inclusive Democracy* (London/N.Y: Cassell/Continuum, 1997), ch. 1.
- [13] T. Fotopoulos, [The Multidimensional Crisis and Inclusive Democracy, \(2005\), ch. 2.](#)
- [14] Ibid. ch. 3.
- [15] T. Fotopoulos, *Towards An Inclusive Democracy*, ch. 2.
- [16] Bernard Cassen, 'The United States of Europe', *Le Monde diplomatique* (January 2003).
- [17] T. Fotopoulos, "[Class divisions and the liberatory subject today](#)", *The International Journal of INCLUSIVE DEMOCRACY*, Vol. 1, No. 1 (October 2004).
- [18] See the open letter sent to the EU leaders on the jubilee celebrations that was signed by Dario Fo, Günter Grass, Jürgen Habermas, Václav Havel, Seamus Heaney, Bernard Henri-Levy, Harold Pinter, Franca Rame, Tom Stoppard. It was published under the title 'Darfur: a letter from Europe's leading writers', *The Independent* (24/3/2007).