

ALTER SUMMIT

Towards a people's manifesto
Our urgent common priorities for a democratic,
social, ecological and feminist Europe

Working doc – March 2012
LAST DISCUSSION ROUND

*** AMENDMENTS TO BE SENT BEFORE APRIL 27th TO info@altersummit.eu ***

ROLL BACK AUSTERITY... BEFORE AUSTERITY DESTROYS DEMOCRACY!

Europe stands on the edge of a precipice, looking into the abyss. Austerity policies drive the peoples of Europe into poverty, threaten democracy and dismantle social policies. Acute humanitarian crises devastate the countries most affected while mounting inequalities endanger social cohesion, and women and young people are hit hardest, by the crisis.

An unelected European elite employs ever more authoritarian methods to prop up a failed neoliberal system—all this despite widespread protest and resistance. Democracy and peace are threatened, and racism, xenophobia, nationalism, fascism and discriminations (homophobia, sexism...) are rising. The crisis is getting deeper every day and the possibility of breakdown of the European Union can no longer be denied.

Our most urgent priority is to rebuild real democracy. European institutions and governments are now governing on behalf of the financial markets and trampling on popular sovereignty: they must be recaptured. The public interest must prevail and equality and justice ensured. We base our demands for a democratic, social, ecological and feminist Europe on these principles, in solidarity with the peoples of the world.

1) End debt slavery

Public debt stems from economic and political choices still on the agenda of European institutions and governments: **decades of deliberately chosen tax policies** have consciously and outrageously enriched a small minority and boosted the profits of big corporations; public entities and public money have **bailed out innumerable banks**; **austerity policies have dried up** household and small business incomes and made the recession worse ; **speculation on public bonds** was made possible for private banks while public finance has in many places been tainted by **corruption and collusion** between elected representatives and private interests.

Moreover, in many countries, private, as opposed to national debt, is due to household borrowing, aggressively promoted by the financial sector and governments in order to compensate for the stagnation of real wages.

Measures taken by European institutions and governments are designed to make the people pay for this debt. But part of this debt could be considered illegitimate since it was accumulated with no regard for the common good, and it is now clear that many countries will anyway never be able to reimburse their debt.

Human rights come before debt service, and human needs before profit! As a matter of urgency, we demand European-wide measures to free peoples from the pressure of financial markets and the iniquities of austerity and restore popular sovereignty. To those ends, fiscal, tax and monetary policies must be altered so as to free European countries from future debt traps.

Our common and urgent demands:

1. Immediately cancel ‘memoranda’ imposed by the troika upon over-indebted countries; then cancel a large part of the public dept without harming the interests of the small bondholders and savers, and of the public pension funds. The actual amounts to be cancelled should be defined democratically, country by country. In this regard, citizen debt audits can serve as a useful tool.
2. Payment of the remainder must be made conditional on the respect of economic development and ecological transition, social and economic rights, strengthening of public services and reduction of unemployment and poverty.
3. A one-off wealth levy targeting the richest segment of the population should be declared.
4. The European Central Bank – and other public European banking institutions – must lend directly to States at low interest and under democratic control, without conditions imposed by neoliberal ‘reform’ measures.

II) For an ecological and social Europe: roll-back austerity !

Throughout Europe, particularly its southern and eastern rims, European institutions and governments impose harsh austerity policies, supposedly for the sake of debt reduction. Entire populations are overburdened, public spending is cut dramatically in many essential areas, valuable investments in research or industrial activities that could lead us towards a social and ecological transition are downgraded.

Austerity policies imposed by European institutions and governments create a downward spiral, destroy economies, create more deficits, debts and unemployment and intensify the ecological crisis. Meanwhile, a small minority continues to enrich itself.

Now more than half of European wealth is owned by 10% of the population. Present policies are in fact designed to maintain these inequalities, as well as the neoliberal model which is devastating the planet and undermining democratic and social rights.

We demand a complete reversal of these policies, and another model of society that ensures social justice, equality, a just distribution of wealth, ecological sustainability and protection of the commons.

Our common and urgent demands:

1. Roll back austerity now: it is driving Europe deeper into recession. Cancel or veto the treaties and regulations that underpin it such as the Pact of competitiveness now under discussion, the Fiscal Pact, the Six-Pack, the Two-Pack or the Pact for Competitiveness currently negotiated.... Fiscal policy should remain a democratic choice.
2. Ensure tax justice with a just, progressive and permanent taxation system on revenues, wealth and corporate profits with effective minimum rates in all European countries. Increases of consumption taxes should be frozen (VAT...); tax havens prohibited and measures against fraud and tax avoidance and evasion strengthened;
3. Develop public, Europe-wide investment programmes for social and ecological transition based on an industrial and agricultural policy that addresses the ecological crisis as well as the need to create millions of quality jobs. Such programmes would require reliance on ecologically sustainable and socially useful activities of public interest (energy transition, public transportation, food sovereignty, digital technology...) while simultaneously cutting military spending and socially and ecologically harmful expenses. The EU budget should be reoriented in this direction.
4. Strengthen and develop the social and ecological commons, redefine and develop **public services** (including health, education, early childhood nurturing, transport and energy, water, information and culture, public housing...). Such services should be democratically managed and publicly or cooperatively owned.

III) Rights for all: no to poverty and precariousness!

Austerity policies attack our economic and social rights and social protection. They lead to a drop in the standard of living, and in some countries to acute humanitarian distress. The consequences are massive unemployment, downgrading of working and living conditions, looting of the countryside, and acceleration of ecological disasters.

In the context of the crisis, these policies now go even further. They are attacking labour rights and the role of unions, including their capacity to organize and bargain collectively. They impose competitiveness as a principle in order to divide people, increase profits, attack social protection and aim at commodifying and financializing all aspects of nature.

Among precarious workers, women are first in line: they are particularly affected by attacks on labour rights. They are also obliged to compensate with unpaid care work for the demolition of public services. These policies hit people living precariously hardest, such as pensioners, unemployed and migrants. An entire generation of European youth is subjected to unprecedented social decline.

We affirm that every person enjoy effective democratic, economic, environmental and social rights, with a job and an income sufficient for a dignified life.

Our common and urgent demands:

1. Restore the right to bargain collectively and the right of collective action; restore collective agreements and labour rights under threat from austerity packages; respect ILO standards wherever they are not applied ; end precarious work;
2. End social and wage dumping in Europe by building a common ground of collective guarantees and ensuring high level social security systems and economic rights, including housing and healthcare, in all EU countries;
3. Protect the right of indebted households and generally of all people to decent housing. Prohibit evictions and auctions of private houses and apartments enacted against owners who cannot pay their debts.
4. Increase wages, establish a sufficient minimum wage fixed by law or binding collective agreement in each country) and a minimum income sufficient for a dignified life;
5. Impose equality of wages, pensions and career development between women and men. Forbid discrimination at work based on gender, ethnic origin, nationality or sexual orientation;
6. Decrease working hours without decreasing wages and ensure a just division of unpaid care work; promote work for all with decent working conditions. The salary differential in the same company should not exceed a maximum level to be defined.
7. Forbid job cuts for private groups making profits.

IV) For a democratic economy: place banks at the service of public interest

The collapse of the private banking system in 2008 was not an accident but rather a direct consequence of finance serving exclusively shareholders and speculators to the detriment of the public interest. In recent decades, governments have both authorised and encouraged this system by consenting to every demand of the finance industry. Many public or cooperatively-owned credit institutions, previously devoted to financing useful regional activities, have been privatised.

Governments responded to the crisis by injecting billions of euros into bank rescues at the expense of taxpayers and provided the finance industry with unconditional guarantees, thereby strengthening the private banks even further.

Banks must serve the public interest, society and the environment: from now on, European institutions and governments must take all necessary measures to end the disproportionate power of financial institutions, including strict regulation and/or public and democratic control of banks.

Our common and urgent demands:

1. Complete separation of commercial and investment banks;
2. Review the disproportionate guaranties granted to private finance and exercise public control over bank failures to avoid negative impacts on economic activity; if banks are “too big to fail”, appropriate preventive measures should be taken to avoid such impacts.
3. Impose strong and enforceable regulations so that credit can be oriented towards social, ecological, economic and job-creating activities in favour of social development;
4. Give priority and incentives to collectively owned cooperative public credit systems, under effective social control;
5. Prohibit the use of tax havens. Outlaw shadow banking practices and any form of hiding off-balance sheet activity. Tax financial transactions and restore, WHERE NECESSARY, capital controls. Impose transparency and abolish bank secrecy rules.

Stand up for democracy!

Under the pretext of crisis, current developments in Europe are the most serious denial of democracy the continent has experienced since the end of World War II. Not only is democratic debate silenced, but division is encouraged between citizens and between countries. The predictable outcome is the rise of right-wing or fascist movements as popular resentment is directed against migrants or other European peoples. Rolling back austerity and rebuilding democracy are the conditions to defeat these movements.

The chief victims of these policies are the most vulnerable and defenceless Europeans. They suffer the consequences of financial market and corporate domination of and of the capitulation of European institutions and governments to these interests. Defence of democracy must be our highest and immediate priority. Alternatives exist: our responsibility is to change the balance of power in order to impose them and rebuild genuine social and economic democracy in Europe.

Because we want democratic government, not technocratic "governance"

*Because we want genuine democracy and popular sovereignty,
not the self-appointed leadership of European elites;*

*Because we refuse to base European prosperity on the exploitation
of people and nature in the rest of the world and a Europe that contributes to conflicts and militarisation;*

*Because we want to end the exploitation and the oppression of women
and to break with patriarchy*

***We are determined to build a united movement
for a democratic, social, ecological and feminist Europe!***

Our goal is to support and strengthen the peoples' struggles; our forces are converging to fight for the above demands and to make them a reality through national and European actions.

The Alter Summit in Athens on June 7th and 8th 2013 will be a decisive step in this direction.

calendar and information: www.altersummit.eu

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