

Let's resist the spread of austerity

Call to Trades Unions

For the European demonstration of Trades Unions on September 29th, 2010, a European front opposed to growth asks trades unions to break with “productivism”, otherwise they will never be able to get out of the role of active contributors to the destructive logic which currently prevails in the economy. Opponents to growth aim is ‘good living’ rather than ‘more and more’ and propose significantly to reduce working time and to defend guaranteed sufficient income.

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The ETUC is organising a European Action Day on September 29th, 2010 in Brussels. The motto of the Euro demo “*No to austerity, priority to employment and growth !*”.

Opponents to growth and well known individuals (see list below) support the fight of the Trades Unions against the will of the capitalist establishment to allow the weight of the crisis to be borne by the labour market but regret their call for continued growth, which is no way out of the crisis and put the ETUC in an untenable position.

Signatories of this release on behalf of opponents to growth :

1. denounce the logic of ever increasing production and growth. The logic of ‘more and more’ money and goods is not a viable way forward as it is neither possible nor desirable to produce and consume more and more.
2. believe that austerity for the majority of people is the logical consequence of economic growth and endless production.
3. call union forces to open their eyes to the suicidal nature of the dogma of economic growth and ever increasing production and appeal to them to bring about a break with productivist tendencies and /policies.
4. offer a more realistic way forward which promotes ‘good living’ and not ‘more and more’ : demolish the myths perpetuated by economists and change objectives, reduce working time, guaranteed a sufficient income for all.

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1. Denounce the logic of ever increasing production and growth. The logic of ‘more and more’ money and goods is not a viable way forward as it is neither possible nor desirable to produce and consume more and more.

Ensuring growth demands continually increasing indefinitely the production of goods and services. Production of these goods and services requires the exploitation of natural resources and human labour. Infinite growth necessarily implies *infinite* exploitation of the Earth and of mankind. Today this crazy race is coming to an end and shows the extent and the magnitude of the catastrophic damage that it causes : planet Earth which is now in its death throes due largely to human activity, its devastation causing violent effects primary among the most vulnerable. With every passing day people are considered more and more as

consumers / producers in order to fuel a machine which produces ill effects, to the detriment of individual and collective well-being. The social bond is eaten away by merchandising and insane competition, which simultaneously fractures relations between individuals, peoples and generations. Social inequalities are on the increase everywhere in the world, poverty continues to spread in an even more violent way. Environmental imbalances are related to excessive production principally caused by Western countries. It is now clear that the universalisation of lifestyle in materially rich countries is not possible. Whatever orthodox, establishment economists think, it is impossible for example for every resident of India and China to own a car, a TV and a fridge as we do in the West : the planet simply wouldn't survive, and consequently no would we humans.

Facing this economic as well as human and ecological failure, the pursuit of economic growth cannot be a solution : to prevail, this logic necessarily demands sustained over-consumption of ever more resources and unceasing exploitation of workers, with, as a corollary, a concomitant degradation of Planet Earth and of human relations.

2. Believe that austerity for the majority of people is the logical consequence of economic growth and endless production.

The wave of austerity submerging European nations is imposed by financial institutions with active support of 'socio-democrate' states. What we refer to today as 'austerity' is a new step in this requisite degradation in order to produce 'growth' : with speculators seeking to maximize their profits and the 'cult of growth' at all costs precipitating competition between workers worldwide, the population is required to reign in their spending tighten the belts in order to perpetuate the economic process and keep the machine running.

Continued economic growth can only be achieved at the cost of more and more violent repetition of this logic of devastation. Growth naturally ensures austerity in rich countries just as it already puts millions of people across the world in the most severe / extreme poverty.

3. Call Unions forces to open their eyes to the suicidal nature of the dogma of economic growth and ever increasing production and appeal to them to bring about a break with productivist tendencies and /policies.

Coming out to the Second World War, Unions forces made an historic compromise with capitalism when the fruits of growth and productivity could benefit everyone thanks to substantial improvements of working conditions obtained in hard negotiations. But since the end of the 1970s, the logic of capital growth has led it to upset the balance. Since the material well-being of people in our affluent countries declines despite the almost continuous growth of 'PIB', while the poorest people remain poor, the gap is still widening between rich and poor in our own regions just as in the rest of the world.

Caught by the spurious logic of infinite growth, trades unions are henceforth reduced mainly to negotiating the limitation of the speed at which working conditions and levels of solidarity deteriorate. Thus the call for quality jobs during the September 29th Euro-demo is opposed to profitability and growth objectives which the ETUC seems to be extolling in the same slogan.

In order to preserve the strenght of hard won solidarity established after the Second World War, it is now imperative to abandon the false logic of endless accumulation.

We call upon unionised members of the various national and regional components of the ETUC to advocate loudly within their organisations a radical change away from excessive productivity and towards 'good living' and solidarity, and against the overt 'more and more-ism' of widespread, exaggerated competitiveness.

It is time that unions open their eyes to the suicidal nature of the dogma of economic growth

and hyper-production and initiate without delay a profound change in direction to tackle head on these two fundamentally flawed logics, which have hitherto proved so socially, humanely and ecologically devastating.

4. Offer a more realistic way forward which promotes ‘good living’ and not ‘more and more’ : demolish the myths perpetuated by economists and change objectives, reduce working time, guaranteed a sufficient income for all.

In our opinion for the necessary transition to a sustainable society to be socially possible and fair, three goals must be aimed for simultaneously :

- a profound re-evaluation of the beliefs which support current policies and a change of objectives : the discrediting of the economic myth of the infinite growth ; cooperation and good living in place of competition and the ‘more and more’ culture.
- the rejection of the ethos of ‘work and more work’ in favour of work-sharing, the re-appraisal of our attitudes to time and rediscover our values and good sense : the implementation of a sizeable reduction in paid work time.
- the guarantee of a sufficient income for everyone (and correspondingly, introduce, in parallel to this, a maximum income), most notably guaranteeing right of access to common land and to collectively managed public services and communal facilities to every person (social security, education, access to energy, water, etc.).

Our countries have never been so well off, but our organisation is both inequitable and destructive. A change in direction is urgently needed. The means are available, we have to summon the collective strength to oppose the established powers-that-be and put in place alternatives. Trades Unions must once more assume the emancipatory role which historically was theirs, clearly breaking with the destructive logic of hyper-productivity and boundless growth.

This appeal is, at the same time, an invitation to friendly dialogue with Unions forces.

An initiative of the mpOC, Belgium. www.objecteursdecroissance.be

Signatories (organisations and individuals) – updated on 30 sept. 2010:

Belgique:

- ATTAC - ULB
- Groupe de Réflexion et d'Action Pour une Politique Ecologique (GRAPPE)
- Le Début des Haricots
- Les Amis de la Terre – Belgique
- Mouvement politique des objecteurs de croissance
- Nature & Progrès Belgique
- Respire asbl
- Sens dessus dessous asbl
- Véloration

- Paul Lannoye, député européen honoraire - ancien président du Groupe des Verts au Parlement européen

- Jean Cornil, ancien parlementaire, militant existentiel
- Alain Adriaens, Député bruxellois 1989-2004

Espagne:

- Collectivo Deshazkundera
- Coordinadora Verde
- Dale Vuelta-Bira beste aldera! (Movimiento por el decrecimiento)
- Ekologistak Martxan. Euskalherria
- Red Decrecimiento Sevilla, Transición en Comunidad
- Sagarrak
- Tiana Solidaria
- Una Sola Terra
- Joan Martinez-Alier, économiste, Université Autonome de Barcelone, coordinateur de la Revista Ecologia Politica
- Carlos Taibo, Professeur de Sciences-Po, Université Autonome de Madrid
- Iñaki Valentín, membre de Deshazkundera et de Antikapitalistak
- Florent Marcellesi, coporte-parole de la Coordinadora Verde
- Santiago Vilanova, romancier, romancier

France:

- Association des Objecteurs de Croissance
- Action consommation
- Bretagne décroissance
- Coopérative du Mouvement des Objecteurs de Croissance (MOC)
- Groupe pour la décroissance à Oloron
- Parti des Objecteurs de Croissance
- Parti Pour La Décroissance
- Paul Aries, directeur du Sakorphage, journal d'analyse politique
- Yves Cochet, député
- Alain Gras, sociologue, Université Paris I Panthéon-Sorbonne
- Serge Latouche, économiste, Université de Paris-Sud 11
- François Schneider, docteur en sciences, auteur
- Jacques Testart, biologiste, directeur de recherches honoraire à l'inserm

Italia:

- Movimento per la Decrescita Felice (MDF)

Netherlands:

- Jan Juffermans, member of the Platform for a Fair and Sustainable Economy, author

Suisse:

- Réseau Objection de Croissance (R.O.C) Suisse
- Jean Robert, architecte, auteur
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