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POLICY IN A TIME OF MONSTERS: TEN THESES

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To diagnose the malaise which political ecology suffers from in the current political system, beset by crises of both economic and cultural natures, we must first examine the position of the Greens in the political landscape, and their relation to both the Left and the Right. The following ten theses outline how ecologist parties can strengthen their bases by re-imagining a new kind of political platform and adopting a cooperative approach.

The old is dying and the new cannot be born; in this interregnum monsters can appear. - A. Gramsci

Thesis 1. The current crisis dilutes the differences between productivist parties and radicalises those between productivists and ecologists.

The world crisis of liberalism is progressively erasing the differences between social democracy, social-liberalism and liberalism; between the French Socialist Party (PS), Union for a Popular Movement (UMP), Union for Independent Democrats (UDI), and Modem. In many ways, the adoption of the treaties on the Golden Rule (TSCG), the Competitiveness Pact (CICE), and the Responsibility Pact place the Ayrault and Valls governments on par or to the right of the Sarkozy governments.

The world crisis of productivism is progressively radicalising the difference between ecology (organised or not), parties on the Left, and traditional Rightist parties. Over the course of the last 25 years, social democracy in its move towards liberalism (and in the name of a rejection of Colbertism) adopted stances, which were more open to ecology. Nevertheless, the tension surrounding the old model remained intact - see Notre-Dame des Landes and Sivens - reminding us of the 1970s and the skirmishes in Larzac and Maleville; but with the "socialists" in the role of Pompidou, Messmer, Giscard, and Chirac.

Thesis 2. The rise of populist-nationalist forces is the result of the general crisis of liberal-productivism, but is also a result of a failure of traditional political forces on the Left to offer a response to the crisis. This includes those on the Left who have not rallied to support liberalism. Just like in the 1930s, there is a good chance that the extreme Right could win elections in France, and elsewhere in Europe.

In liberal globalisation, the Nation-State no longer "protects" its citizens. That means that only a "super-State", like the European Union can enact rules to protect citizens. However, in the case of the European Union, the legitimacy of the institution has yet to be established. This explains the rise in "nationalist populist" parties, both liberal (Netherlands and Great Britain), which pit the small modernist entrepreneur against the "diktats" of Brussels; or dirigistes, like Marine Le Pen's made-over version of the National Front (FN). They are able to sway a blue-collar base, which erroneously takes anti-liberalism for national sovereignty. However, filling the role of promoter of "the Nation-State protector of the little guy" presupposes that other players on the political scene have abandoned that role. This is precisely what has happened in France

The PS has come to power three times to "change the lives of its constituents" each time it has strayed from that aim, making the FN the primary choice of blue-collar workers and youth. The PS bungled the gradual move out of the crisis of Fordism in 81-83. Under Jospin, despite a good start, it mishandled the re-evaluation of liberal productivism. During the current crisis (2008-2012), it deepened its liberal-economic leanings, when actually what was really needed was heightened management and regulation through policy. None of the PS's policy content is progressive at this point, despite the fact that it still has a number of progressive voters, and even a spattering of progressive members in parliament.

The collapse of Communism in parallel is also very significant. Throughout the 1970s (the years of the first post-WWII crisis) Communism gradually fell apart, essentially because of its failure to heed André Gorz's warning (1964!) about the reality of the new political and social scene, i.e., that it had shifted to Europe. The Communist Party (PC) was unable to respond to the crisis of the 1970s and equally unable in the 2000s, meaning that it only survived as a protest vote party. The PS's struggles never boosted the PC. The election results of France's Left Front (Front de Gauche) essentially remained stable in 2014, but basically because they picked up the votes of the Trotskyists, whose parties had essentially ceased to exist.

Just as in the 1930s, the failure of traditional Leftist parties - more hesitant to take a populist stance on nationalist theories - leaves room for success by the extreme Right. This makes it almost inevitable that the latter will indeed hold a leadership position in the near future. Under these circumstances, with a view to blocking the FN, it is fully legitimate for democratic and pro-solidarity parties to support their counterparts on the Right so long as they share the same values: as was the case in the past with support for Chirac and or in the future with Juppé, or even Sarkozy vs. Le Pen. However, a "Republican Front" should not become the rule (see: SPD, Hindenburg, Hitler).

Thesis 3. Abandoning its contractual autonomy approach in favour of a "go for the jobs approach" has meant that the Greens have crashed along with the traditional Leftist parties.

Over the course of the last 25 years, political ecology gradually gained strength with each failure of the productivist Left. The Greens were able to get institutional positions either through proportional elections or via electoral coalitions strictly dependent on agreements, which included policy prescriptions: that is what was known as contractual autonomy.

However, the recent positioning of political ecology as a mere branch of the "Left" has increasingly brought out in each election the link between the flip-side of the old Left and of political ecology. Thus, in the 2014 European Parliament elections, Europe Ecology was the hardest hit. Their votes were slashed in half compared to 2009. Right or wrong, voters viewed the Greens in elected positions as having just picked up the crumbs left behind by the PS. So voters "threw the toy spaniels in the water and drown them beating them with sticks."

Voters do not hold it against the Greens that they entered into a governing coalition, they hold it against them that they did not follow through with what they had voted them into office to do: prevent the Hollande presidency from turning into a disaster. Speeches delivered by Green ministers in the Aryault government and from members of the EELV leadership really harped on the fact that - despite all criticism - all is for the best in the best of all possible worlds.

Thesis 4. The demise of social-liberalism prevents the Green movement from finding political outlets, but does not prevent it from acting.

Manuel Valls was pretty frank even as early as 2012, yet the extent of Hollande and Ayrault's denial caused a schism as violent as what happened with the SFIO in the 1950s (from Guy Mollet's treachery, following the hope that was sowed by Pierre Mendès-France). This opened the door to hegemony of the Right for nearly twenty-five years.

The "plural majority" approach of 1997 around Lionel Jospin - when the PS made a cultural shift towards ecology and political ecology towards the PS and which was mutually beneficial - will not happen again for a long time. This is in part because a victory of the traditional Left is no longer considered a reason for hope, but not only. It is also because the PS-Green coalition of ministers and members of Parliament from 2012-2014 showed that even with more Greens in key positions than in 1997, the Green presence served no purpose.

Having said that, in the first 23 years of the Fifth Republic, under de Gaulle, Pompidou, and Giscard, popular activism - specifically starting with May 1968 - achieved more social and societal victories than in the next 23 years. A return to the push and pull between social activism and the governing Right, which bargains through various mediations (including with high ranking civil servants from the Left or the extreme Left) is what we will probably see in the years to come.

Thesis 5. There is an immediate need for a change in model, without abandoning efforts to bolster our cultural battle. Nonetheless, engagement in the institutional field remains crucial.

In order to get out of the liberal-productivism crisis in which we find ourselves, we desperately need a road map and one that is detailed enough, like the "Green New Deal". However, we need to immediately implement this roadmap and cannot wait for a definitive victory of cultural hegemony. On the other hand, cultural and ecological hegemony will only be able to progress through the example of its partial implementation, for example as with "cities in transition." Similarly, the implementation of the Fordist model in the thirty years following WWII, in 1936 and then from 1945 on, required the active involvement of those in power (locally and nationally) who were from the erstwhile Front populaire and the National Council of Resistance despite the huge differences in opinion amongst all the various elements: communists, socialists, radicals, Christian-democrats and Gaullists.

Political ecology must gain its ideological and programmatic autonomy again. However, the quest for institutional positions for the purposes of transformational policies must not be neglected out of sheer laziness, purism, or dandyism.

Thesis 6. In order to achieve unity in the cultural battle and a presence in the institutions it is fundamental to go back to a strategy of contractual autonomy.

This is not just for surviving the PS shipwreck, like rats jumping overboard. First and foremost it is important in order to once again achieve full programmatic and electoral autonomy vis-à-vis the traditional Left. Society and the planet need the transformations that only the Greens currently have on offer. Indeed, the aim of the ideological battle for hegemony is to ensure that these solutions be adopted by other political forces.

EELV's sole interest is society's interest as a whole. EELV should be the beacon of hope for those who have the most advanced thinking and experience in innovative ways of producing and consuming, and those who are the most committed to making sure that those ways are implemented and widespread. To do this, ecology needs to use public policy as a lever, for which alliances and compromises will be necessary. However, it will be crucial to carry out a strict analysis of the benefits of the public policy to be implemented to make sure that it justifies said alliance. For this a contract will have to be drafted with the terms and conditions and be deemed null and void if the policy is dropped.

Thesis 7. In seeking contractual alliances, the only thing that matters is the content and not the labels. But the content itself is multidimensional.

In a political landscape where the positions of the candidates and elected officials of the UMP/UDI and those of the PS are muddled and for the most part overlap, (if not entirely) and where those of the UMP/UDI and FN overlap increasingly frequently, and where this overlap causes splintering within each party (members of PS in government vs. dissenting members of the PS, Sarkozy/Juppé), turning to a single "Right/Left" criteria that is a label from an archaic system no longer makes sense.

Prior to entering into negotiations, it is essential to determine whether potential partners are merely playing lip service to certain policy prescriptions or if they really mean it. However, this is not enough. The actual content must look at

not one thing but five: 1) how democratic and respectful of human rights and liberties is the potential partner?; 2) how universalist?; 3) how "ethnocentric" (a euphemism for racist); 4) how liberal or dirigiste? 5) how social, how ecologist?

And this is without factoring in something implicit, which is a big one in the majority of countries around the world (sometimes in France as well, see Hénin-Beaumont, Villejuif, etc): how honest is the potential partner?; how corrupt?; how Mafioso?

These 6 criteria will be the basis for the Greens analysis as to how close or how far away they are from their potential allies. It is likely that in the majority of cases, this will turn out to show them closer to those players who are traditionally labelled as "Leftist," but that will not always be the case.

EELV maintains that "comprehensively" the way out of the crisis consists in recognizing that all people have the same rights, with a view to solidarity to anti-globalization, with a step towards a federal Europe as a step towards a universal republic (or at least a hierarchy of universal legal standards), with more regulation with a view to sharing work and wealth and a shift in the productive model towards a sustainable development model.

Potential partners are far from being convinced of all of this but they are at least opened to one chapter or another, even within a single given party. This means that the political action of the Greens must be oriented locally at each relevant level (Europe, Nation, Region, greater-metropolitan area...) through a concrete analysis of the situation: i.e., "subsidiarity".

Thesis 8. In 2015 elections, when a win of the right is inevitable, absolute priority must be given to the autonomy of political ecology.

If "entering into agreements" is meant to push through urgent public policy at the price of a slight undermining of our cultural battle, it is useless to waste efforts in favour of a coalition which scantily reflects our values and that is also destined to failure. This holds true in departmental elections (binominal - two rounds) and regional elections (proportional - two rounds), autonomy in the first round must be the rule and any contracts the exception. In the second and third round, mergers and dropping out can only be made a reality if a solid agreement on platform is entered into (and not according to perfunctory self-proclaimed "Left-right" labels) and based on a lucid analysis of the real potential for implementation. It is useless to "sacrifice oneself" with a loser, but it is important to think hard and long before entering a coalition with a winner.

Thesis 9. Strengthening political ecology will have to be done through a "cooperative" approach and by moving away from closed off party constructs

In addition to the relevance of its political platform, what really made Europe Ecology strong initially - and what put it on equal footing with the PS in 2009 (PS which was in the opposition and from which the Left Front had essentially distanced itself from, was its "cooperative" based plan. The goal was not just to serve as an umbrella group for all ecologists (which would have been a noble goal in itself), it was to invent a fluid group, that is better adapted to contemporary society and to dissolving party membership more easily. EELV began slipping with the regional elections of 2010. That was also in part due to being more "open" (something that was already ingrained in the Greens) to some big names. The party's collapse in 2014 is also linked (in addition to having given up its position on "going for the jobs") to its full on dropping of the cooperative idea.

Thesis 10. As early as 2015 and in the run up to 2017, EELV must prepare for running autonomous candidacies of "Ecologist cooperatives."

How can we gain back the enthusiasm and support that we had in 2009 (autonomy under the banner of a Green New Deal)? This will require going back to a focus on content and contractual autonomy, but also through a return to the cooperative. A recommendation was made that lists could come from "workshops" or "town hall meetings" that would be very open to the general public. This is an excellent idea so long as it does not just result in activists towing a line that is sent from party management. Local political ecology networks must be able to weigh in on potential agreements (specifically in the second round of voting).

We do not need internal debates, with lots of media attention because of party "stars". We do not need a debate between those who, having sucked up everything from government, are now playing the role of the holiest of the holy vs. those who were not a part of government and now blame the former for not having been strong enough. We do not need the latter to demonstrate that they are ready to roll out everything at any price whereby transforming this into a sad and never-ending back and forth hero-betrayer.

What we do need is to test candidates who are prone to represent the cooperative in national elections. And we should start testing them in Departmental and Regional elections in France. These individuals should represent the values and projects of the Greens (autonomy, solidarity and responsibility), including against the old productivist and nationalist parties from the "Left." They should be representatives of the method that was used to bring together party activists, activists from associations and other "major witnesses". These people should have stood out within the EELV ranks, like Eric Piolle, or within civil-society, like Marie-Monique Robin.