AUSTERITARIANISM IN EUROPE: WHAT OPTIONS FOR RESISTANCE?

Richard Hyman (LSE)
STOP THE CUTS
JOIN THE RESISTANCE
OVERVIEW

• austeritarianism: a new form of class struggle (from above)
• trade unions: the contradictions of crisis corporatism
• ‘new social movements’: innovations and tensions
• the political arena: is there a left alternative?
• the variable geometry of resistance
  ➢ not a purely academic question
AUSTERTARIANISM IN EUROPE

- neoliberalism: bankrupt but still hegemonic
- the ‘Washington consensus’ exported to Brussels
- dysfunctional architecture of the eurozone: divided by a common currency
- ‘new economic governance’: punish the victim
- is resistance futile?
Die Krise sind sie. Die Lösung sind wir.

La crise c'est eux. La solution c'est nous.
TRADE UNIONS: STILL RELEVANT?

- depleted resources
- three contradictions:
  - global crisis, local responses
  - resistance or damage limitation?
  - insiders or outsiders?
- ‘crisis corporatism’: defending the ‘core constituency’?
- but important efforts to engage with the most vulnerable
‘NEW SOCIAL MOVEMENTS’

• the ‘movements of the squares’ : transnational emulation
• youth protests against unemployment and precarious work
• spontaneity and social media
• ‘defence of the commons’ and ‘solidary economy’
• problems of aggregating diversity : there is no homogeneous ‘precariat’
• (at best) ambivalent relationship with trade unions
Oh San Precario, Protettore di noi,
precari della terra
Dacci oggi la maternità pagata
Proteggi i dipendenti delle catene commerciali, gli
angeli del call center, le partite Iva e gli
collaboratori appesi ad un filo
Dona a loro ferie e contributi pensionistici, reddito e...
THE STATE OF POLITICS AND THE POLITICS OF THE STATE

• the exhaustion of social democracy
  ➢ loss of alternative social and economic vision
  ➢ disgraceful role in Greek crisis
• the rise of ‘Euroscepticism’: why not?
• some (precarious ?) advances for the left
  ➢ but dilemmas of ‘socialism in one country’
  ➢ main beneficiaries of austeritarianism: xenophobic right
THE VARIABLE GEOMETRY OF RESISTANCE

- obstacles to solidarity *within* countries
- and difficult imperatives of international solidarity
  - an ‘alliance of national liberation fronts’?
- collective identity requires new understandings and new language
- from despair to hope: is there an alternative?
ENDGAME?

• Erne 2015 : EU is now a political union
  ➢ model not federal state but MNC
  ➢ central direction, financial performance indicators, punitive sanctions over subsidiaries
• for rulers of actually existing Europe, Syriza had to fail
  ➢ logic not economic but crudely political : enforcing TINA
• democracy across Europe is at stake
• academic detachment = *trahison des clercs* ?
la lutte continue

THINK OUTSIDE THE BOX