

DISCUSSION PAPER

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WHY LEFT-WING INDUSTRIAL POLICY? - A PROGRESS REPORT

Analysis

If we look at the state of European integration we find that the power elites have never seriously attempted to build the EU as a social project. Since the advent of the world financial and economic crisis, the question of a social union is no longer even talked about. A common currency with a European market dominated by a German export surplus, combined with a sustained low income policy and dismantling of the social protection system in Germany, results in our trading partners finding themselves in debt and puts the development of their wage and social protection systems under pressure. The devastating social impact of the crisis and austerity policy in Europe can be seen everywhere. An important motive for the integration of Western Europe after the Second World War was the attempt to create a European framework for lasting peace. Unfortunately this European integration in the form of economic and monetary union has become the vehicle for a new pursuit of hegemony by Germany, the result of which is the de-industrialisation of the states on the periphery of the EU. Reconstruction of their own industry would give them more room for manoeuvre and enable them to regenerate their social protection systems.

Alternatives

Of course there are alternatives to a policy of cuts and economies. And it is within this larger strategic context that our debate about a progressive left-wing industrial policy must take place. Viewed as a key component of a policy that wants far more than cuts and economies and hence also wants to end social suffering: a policy that promotes a fundamental change of course in our social development.

Central questions

- Can a left-wing industrial policy be a project for real European integration, a project which combines the questions of democracy, ecology as well as the social question and identifies alternatives to achieving fundamental democratisation and social and ecological transformation?
- The big “a priori” for every left-wing industrial policy in Europe of the 21st century must be the climate crisis. How can we create good jobs in an industry which actively helps us to fight this climate crisis?
- How can industrial policy and gender policy be combined?
- How can a left-wing industrial policy make a direct contribution to the fundamental democratisation of economic processes, penetrating deep inside business and corporate structures?
- What does a left-wing industrial policy look like for “industry 4.0”, for 3D printers or modern technologies in general?

- What room for manoeuvre does the current legal framework of the EU offer us to create a left-wing industrial policy? What should the legal framework of the EU look like before it can do justice to left-wing industrial policy?
- How can we merge left-wing industrial policy and regional economic cycles?
- What role can cooperatives play in a left-wing industrial policy?
- Who are the major players? Can the strategic alliance between left-wing parties and trade unions be consolidated or, where necessary, revitalised? Can players from the field of ecology be won over to such a project?

Contradictions

- The questions of how far a socially equitable investment policy can be linked to the question of the environment are hotly debated across the diverse ranks of the left in Europe.
- In a discussion about a left-wing industrial policy, what is the right approach to achieving gender equality regarding wages and salaries? This is relevant because the old industries in particular, which frequently enjoy special protection under industrial policy, are dominated by men and the supporting service sectors, which are frequently out-sourced, are the preserves of underpaid women.
- A left-wing industrial policy must be embedded in solidarity and the international fight for an equalised international balance of trade as well as fair wages worldwide. This applies both to the relationship of the European periphery to the heart of Europe as well as to the Global South.
- How can we lessen, if not resolve, the contradiction between the necessary components for planning, a democratically controlled market and the efforts to achieve autonomy of players at a local level?
- We need a left-wing industrial policy but we seldom have strong left-wing governments. What can we do if we do not have a left-wing government? Are there social substitutes for a national industrial policy from the left? Can we create networks to bring about structural changes in the economy through cooperative financing, training and joint planning of procurement, production and distribution? Is something similar to a “non-parliamentary left-wing industrial policy” possible?

Structure

In order to be able to compare the Member States of the EU, we have commissioned case studies / country reports with a standard structure which will gradually be published here.

With contributions from Greece, Bulgaria, Slovenia, Croatia, Italy, Portugal, France, Poland and Germany we have found a way to compare and to identify common ground, differences and dependencies of differing economies in a single market as well as their legal frameworks. The result is a broad economic database which we will use in a more politico-strategic debate and which reflects the current and possible future state of a common progressive European industrial policy.

Future prospects

These studies show that a pan-European process of de-industrialisation has taken place in the last few decades and has simply been intensified by the current crisis. The

political project of a left-wing industrial policy tackles neoliberal capitalism driven by financial markets and its profiteers. There is no crisis for these players - profits continue to flow and so there is no break with the pre-crisis period in their rationale. So we need players to come together who can fight the effects of this multiple crisis here and now. These allies come from an unbelievably broad field of committed scientists, politicians, trade unionists, members of cooperatives, people active in energy campaigns, who fight privatisations, who comment on care work and who increasingly promote healthy agriculture. Our project will focus on a specific question of left-wing policy, namely, of promoting industry so that it serves the needs of all and protects a sustainable climate.

Therefore we propose that we start a debate on whether we should not find “entry sectors” where we could immediately start to develop parts of a left-wing industrial policy. We propose the health, housing and energy sectors. Social struggles are already taking place in these sectors: it is a question of environmental protection, jobs, life shared in common, and each in its own way represents the cornerstone both of a capitalist society as well as of a possible socio-ecological transformation of our society.

As a result of our workshop we will publish a series of papers, starting with the country reports. This year we will organise further meetings on this question at international meetings at a European level. And we already intend to make the question of a left-wing industrial policy in Europe a focal point of our work in the immediate future.

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