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Proposals For the establishment of a Social, Economic and Policy Research Institute

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Proposals
for the establishment of a
Social, Economic and Policy Research Institute

Rationale:

Recent developments and the crisis of late capitalism, the intensification of inequality and impoverishment, the collapse of "real existing" socialism, and the forces for European integration have triggered a fundamental restructuring of capitalism posing new political problems. The complexity of these developments, combined with the forces of globalisation have simultaneously seriously eroded the ability of single states, governments or political parties to autonomously affect change. Disturbingly, there has been/is crisis of confidence among radical critical theory, allowing key aspects of the human experience to be conceptualised as unrelated and autonomous rather than interrelated and determined, provoking a political response which is partial and fragmented. It is time to counter this tendency, and forge a coherent social, political and economic strategy which draws upon the strengths and potentials of critical and Marxist theory.

Social, Economic and Policy Research Institute

The establishment of a independent left *Social, Economic and Policy Research Institute* would endeavour to overcome the problems of

- a. lack of research capacity within small left parties and organisations;
- b. insufficient analysis of global and emerging trends and developments,
- c. deficient policy/strategy alternatives,
- d. relative isolation of parties and organisations within individual states compared to the globalisation of dominant economic and political forces;

Objectives:

The *Social Economic and Policy Research Institute* would be a Left Think-tank for affiliated parties and organisations with the aim of:

- a. providing a resource/data bank of existing research, analysis and commentary
- b. pooling empirical and analytic socio-economic data
- c. creating a library of political information
- d. analysing political and economic trends and developments
- e. monitoring political and social forces
- f. generating, advising and evaluating policy initiatives
- g. establishing a bank of researchers and lecturers to:
 1. advise on policy initiatives
 2. conduct/write empirical or analytic reports
 3. participate in conferences
 4. provide quick-response and access to research and researchers.

Priorities:

It is difficult to see how any of the above functions could be accomplished without a full-time researcher/coordinator. At the very least, individual affiliates would need to designate a particular person to coordinate incoming and outgoing requests. Any development beyond (a) below would require costs, both in set-up, hardware, and research costs (time). The Social, Economic and Policy Research Institute would need to establish a secretariat, with the ability to filter requirements through a coordinating center and data-base..

A minimalist approach would envisage the following prioritised functions:

- a. identification of key individuals within each state with direct access and/or knowledge of influential research in key areas
- b. set up a basic data-base of research and researchers,
- c. coordinate and filter the needs and requests of affiliated parties and organisations;

Additional Functions:

While there is no need to replicate the research that is being conducted throughout Europe, and globally, via private, commercial, public, state and EC research institutions, the political requirements of affiliated parties and organisations would not necessarily coincide with the work being conducted by these institutions. Additionally, as European integration intensifies, there is a compelling need for a more coherent research and policy Left think-tank than can be offered by the loose informal network proposed under (a) above.

Additional functions could involve:

- a. sponsor conferences
- b. initiate research
- c. propose policy initiatives and evaluation
- d. coordinate and bring together researchers

Costs:

Minimalist

The easiest and cheapest project would cost little; i.e. the identification of key individuals within each state in key, designated areas. A list of individuals would be circulated to affiliates who could contact them as appropriate. The amount and value of the information obtained by this method would be dependent upon both the individual researcher and affiliate's time and abilities. Anything beyond this would require basic costs.

Basic

The following costs would need to be considered:

- a. data-basing
- b. travel
- c. research and data acquisition
- d. hardware: computer, networking, fax, etc.
- e. coordinating researcher(s) and secretariat staff

It might be possible to defray some costs by:

- a. affiliation or membership fee
- b. charging sliding-scale costs for access to the data-base or other services, on a fee-for-service basis
- c. establishing a barter system, with individual affiliates pledging a pool of designated researchers to the Institute.

These proposals would defray some day-to-day running-costs, but would neither be satisfactory nor adequate. Therefore, private, international, foundations and endowments should be approached to fund the project, combined with possible state or EC monies.