

Capitalism will not give us the will to fight capitalism – what we need is a new International

*With the rich getting richer and the poor getting poorer, and with socialist parties around Europe fighting only for national attention, is there hope for an international left? **Lea Ypi** (LSE) writes that, more than ever, the world has to be made by those sceptical of capitalism. She makes the case for rebuilding international solidarity.*



At the 2018 World Economic Forum in Davos, Google's CEO [responded to criticism](#) about tax avoidance in the EU by arguing that his company was "happy to pay a higher amount, whatever the world agrees on as the right framework". The trouble is that there is no such thing as the world, and no such thing as an agreement when it comes to how wealth is distributed. There are private companies who gain through profits and there is a public sector that loses through cuts. The rich get richer and the poor get poorer.

The UK, one of Europe's most affluent states, is on the verge of collapse: [child poverty](#), [hunger](#), [rough sleeping](#) are all on the rise. That was the case in the past too. But in the past, losers had figured out two things. The first was that the great means of production had to be democratically controlled. The second was that one had to be internationally organized to hold the winners to account.

Google and Facebook are the 21st-century equivalent of textile and coal factories. But where is the battle cry of the international left for their democratic control? Now one has to wait for Google to say: "[tax us](#)". One has to wait for George Soros to [remind capitalism of its responsibilities](#) to future generations. One has to wait for "le président des riches" (as Macron was [recently called](#)) to kindly ask his friends to share their wealth.

Capitalism is capitalism as much as it used to be. It is transnational as much now as in the past. And it is in crisis, a crisis of production but importantly also of values, and arguably one of the worse in its history. One does not need to wonder whether any of this is still true: [the capitalists have been telling us for quite some time](#). But anticapitalism can't even find a name for itself. And international coordination seems to be nobody's priority.

Even when not playing catch with populists on how to make migrants' life harder, the left is in perpetual self-interrogation mode. Of course there are exceptions. Like the current Labour party, willing to take on capital with a clear anti-austerity message and [reaping the benefits of that message to everyone's surprise](#). But even there, the best outcome one seems to hope for is (serious) social democracy in one country. Yet British workers cannot save themselves if German workers are doomed. And if German workers win at the expense of Greek ones, all remain losers and the crisis is only postponed. Neither loss will turn into a gain, however many fences and walls one builds around one's borders.

Capitalism has no borders and neither should labour. Capitalists are united and so should anticapitalists be. The left needs to rediscover its cosmopolitan roots and build a new International. Of course, times have changed. But have they changed so much?

Both the First and Second International mobilized around issues that were strikingly similar to the ones we seem to find no answers for today: the importation of cheap labour, the effects of foreign workers on national labour organisation, the critique of imperialism linked to the process of dislocation of capital, exploitation in the workplace, shorter working days, and the fight for women's rights. None of these questions has been resolved. But they are international questions, now as they were before.

And yet, socialist parties around Europe seem resolved to continue competing for national attention. That can only be a limited first step. They should call for shared rallies, shared days of strike, a shared constituency. They should construct the same electoral programme and build shared electoral platforms. They should call together for Europe-wide taxation and ultimately much more. They should challenge capitalism as a system and challenge it internationally.

Forget what Google tells you, the winners will not give away anything just because they were asked. And there is no world out there that will agree on anything. The world has to be made by those sceptical of capitalism. They have to coordinate, mobilise, and fight internationally. Now, as in earlier times, capitalism gives us a name for that fight and the means to conduct it. It gives us instant messaging and social networking, the tools which make rebuilding a world of international solidarity easier than ever before. But capitalism will not give us the will to fight it. It cannot make a shared world for us or pretend that it is already out there.

This article represents the views of the author and not those of Democratic Audit. It was originally published on the [LSE British Politics and Policy blog](#).

About the author



Lea Ypi is Professor of Political Theory at the LSE. She is the author of [Global Justice and Avantgarde Political Agency](#) (Oxford University Press 2011) and (with Jonathan White) of [The Meaning of Partisanship](#) (Oxford University Press 2016).

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