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Call for a European Conference against Austerity, Cuts and Privatisation and in Defence of the Welfare State

A new movement has risen in Europe.

In Greece in May a series of general strikes shook the government. In France last autumn, millions went on strike and took to the streets to oppose the increase in pension age. There have been general strikes in Spain, Italy and Portugal. In Britain, a new student movement has taken to the streets against the dismantling of universal education. Ireland has seen its biggest trade union march for a generation and there have been large protests in Germany, Romania, Iceland and elsewhere.

The peoples of Europe face a common enemy. The current debt problem is the latest stage of a long-running crisis of capitalism which is now impacting on virtually every aspect of our lives. But rather than dealing with the fundamental problems, governments, the European Commission and European Central Bank are trying to make the people pay – through public spending cuts, austerity measures, privatization and deregulation of the labour market. We stand for an alternative to the neo-liberal Europe and resistance to this destruction.

In each country in Europe, all the social gains of the post war period are now threatened. The unelected European Central Bank is providing loans to countries like Greece on condition of dramatic cuts in public services, wages and pensions which will lead to massive impoverishment.

2011 will be a vital year – we must work to ensure that this new movement grows in strength and begins to challenge the power of the financial markets. The situation is urgent. The economic crisis continues to deepen, threatening to plunge Europe into a depression.

In Britain we have established a Coalition of Resistance at a conference in November which drew together more than 1200 activists and trade union militants. We are committed to opposing all cuts and privatisation and defending the welfare state. We are encouraging all organisations to work together for a mass campaign of action in local communities and in support of industrial action by trade-unions.

This is already an international movement. But we need to learn from each others' experiences and work towards a co-ordinated resistance across Europe and beyond.

We therefore call for a European Conference against Austerity, to take place in London provisionally on Saturday 1st October, with delegations and representatives from trade-unions, social movements and progressive organisations across Europe. We hope that this conference will be a step towards co-ordinating the resistance by agreeing to a European-wide day of action against Austerity, Cuts and Privatisation and in Defence of our Welfare State.

Yours in solidarity,

Tony Benn, President Coalition of Resistance
Len McCluskey, Unite General Secretary
Bob Crow, RMT General Secretary
John McDonnell MP
Jeremy Corbyn MP
Caoline Lucas MP
Jeremy Dear, NUJ General Secretary
Lindsey German, Convenor Stop the War
Fred Leplat, Coalition of Resistance
Hilary Wainwright, Red Pepper

Ken Loach,
Imran Khan, the People's Charter
Chris Bambery, Secretary Right to Work campaign
Andrew Burgin, Secretary Coalition of Resistance
Bill Greenshields, Chair Communist Party of Britain
Paul Mackney, former UCU General Secretary
Clare Solomon, President ULU Students Union
Kate Hudson
Lee Jasper, BARAC