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Investing in defence to ensure peace and prosperity, not to make war

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The old adage "*Si vis pacem, para bellum*" ("*If you want peace, prepare for war*"), taken up by St Thomas Aquinas in his Treatise on Charity, shows that historically, war and peace are intrinsically linked. Moreover, the definitions of these two concepts bear witness to this: while war is defined as "the use of arms in a conflict between countries, nations, or population groups", peace is often defined not in itself but by reference to war: according to the Dictionary of the French Academy, peace is thus "an international order excluding recourse to war". I would like to discuss the growing importance of these notions for socialism and then to evoke their current understanding by progressives as a whole.

The Second International, founded in 1889, considers peace as a "bourgeois" struggle. Indeed, in the 19th century, the question of peace and war was not a priority for the socialist movement, which focused on improving the living conditions of workers. The rise in tensions that led to the First World War radically changed its position on this question. "The affirmation of peace is the greatest struggle," said Jean Jaurès, who had already been trying for several years to warn of the imminent danger of war - in an article entitled "Peace and Socialism" published in the newspaper L'Humanité on July 9, 1905, he wrote: "Men are bent under the burden of armed peace. The war did not only lead socialism to take

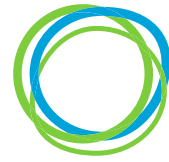
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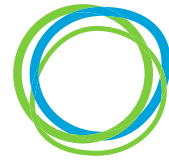


up the subject of national defence; it left a much deeper mark on it, since it led to the disintegration of the Second International and the splits within the socialist parties in the 1920s. The latter, who had not tolerated the Second International's support for the war in 1914, abandoned it but refused to join the Third International (the Communist International). They therefore founded, in 1921, the Union of Socialist Parties for International Action, also called the "Two and a Half" International. The socialists subsequently defended an international order based on peace, through the League of Nations (League) and then the United Nations Organization (UNO), which succeeded it after the Second World War.

If I take the liberty of recalling this historical heritage, it is to underline that we - European progressives - have something to contribute on these eminently regal subjects of peace and war. Defence is everybody's business and cannot remain the prerogative of the right wing of the political spectrum or of a few experts. Renaud Bellais and Axel Nicolas, members of the Observatoire de la défense-Orion of the Fondation Jean Jaurès, have understood this and propose a left-wing defence policy based on three principles that I fully support: "a definition of security that takes the individual as the central point of reference, an active role for the sovereign people in setting the objectives to be achieved, and a resolute internationalist commitment."

Under the first principle, the protection of human rights is placed at the heart of defence policy, in close association with diplomacy and economic and social development policy, because peace is not only the absence of war but a positive value in itself. Diplomacy, development, defence and disarmament must be combined to achieve peace, so that military operations are seen as a temporary instrument. The best examples of this are the military interventions in Iraq, Afghanistan and Libya.

The second principle includes both the strengthening of the army-nation link (in particular with an army that reflects the diversity of society) and the strengthening of the role of parliament in defence policy. Parliamentarians have the legitimacy to define the means to be allocated to defence policy by reconciling the necessary long-term vision with short-term requirements and taking into account the needs of other public



policies. Parliament controls the implementation of defence policy, which presupposes that it is properly informed and that it has the necessary human and financial resources, in particular to have recourse to expertise when this allows it to better understand and question the executive's proposals. In this respect, it would perhaps be appropriate to question the legitimacy of military interventions in the name of the "right to protect" oppressed populations, of which Operation Harmattan is, for France, the archetype. It is also necessary to question the consultation of Parliament, which is reduced to a single vote after the decision to launch an offensive, and which is then no longer consulted if the intervention becomes permanent.

Finally, the third principle means that peace is a collective work, achievable only if States act in concert with each other, in particular within the multilateral framework of the UN. At a time when multilateralism is being undermined - witness the four years of Donald Trump's presidency, the Biden administration's unilateral U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan, as well as China and Russia's challenge to the international order as they promote an alternative international order - it is particularly important to remember this point.

Only the European Union (EU) still vigorously defends multilateralism, and it is best placed to promote peace, since it was itself born out of the desire to end war on European soil. The initiatives are multiplying - Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), Permanent Structured Cooperation (PSC), European Intervention Initiative (EII), European Defence Fund (EDF), Future Air Combat System (FACS) project involving France, Germany and Spain - proving that the EU can be a credible geopolitical actor when it mobilizes itself. European defence should not be conceived as a substitute for the defence policy carried out within the framework of NATO, but rather - as a complement to this policy - as an amplifier of security and as a means of promoting peace in the world. This requires, however, maintaining a dialogue with our immediate neighbors, in particular Turkey and Russia, even if they are difficult partners. It is becoming urgent for Europeans to develop a common vision of defence, one that is coherent and credible, while taking into account the concerns



of each of them, and to pursue a policy of increasing autonomy by equipping its armies to exercise this responsibility. This requires investment in its defence capabilities and above all in research and innovation. Peace is something we can all agree on despite our differences, so perhaps we should start there.

I am convinced that defence, from a progressive perspective, must be seen as a means of ensuring peace in the world. Europe could take up the promotion of peace that Jean Jaurès considered to be France's vocation: "The only social role that France can fulfill in the world, the only one that can give its action a universal value and exalt French souls with a superior emotion in which the life of France and the life of humanity will vibrate, is to help, in the world, by the decided and striking repudiation of all offensive thought and by a propaganda of arbitration and equity, to bring about peace.