

Offre de thèse avec contrat doctoral. Université de Rouen Normandie

Facing the crisis. A European socialist generation in the interwar period (Austria, Belgium, France, Italy).

PELAC

Job information		
	Organisation / Entreprise	Université de Rouen Normandie
	Research Field	Humanities and social sciences
	Researcher Profile	First Stage Researcher (R1)
	Country	France
	Application Deadline	01/05/2026
	Type of Contract	Temporary (3 years), from october 2026
	Job Status	Full time
	Is the Job funded through the UE Research Framework Programme ?	NO
	Is the Job related to staff position within a Research Infrastructure ?	NO
Offer description		
	<p>Context</p> <p>Between 1918 and the mid-1930s, young socialist activists born around 1905 attempted to rethink</p>	

socialism in Europe. This project examines that transnational “generation” — active in Austria, Belgium, France, and Italy — which shared formative experiences (the Great War and the rupture of socialist unity), common frustrations, and a drive for original doctrinal renewal. This generation embodied a left-wing “spirit of the thirties” — distinct from right-wing nonconformist currents — nourished by a socialist internationalist doctrine that its members helped to renew in the moment of its crisis. They sought to adapt European socialism to the crises of interwar modernity and to find a third way between bourgeois liberalism and Bolshevik communism.

Rather than studying each militant group at the national level in a comparative framework, the project focuses on these groups insofar as they constitute and participate in the existence of a single European generation, conceived here as a cohort operating and acting at a transnational scale. The project aims to study the formation and action of this generation — that is, the activist networks and the circulation phenomena that enabled these militants to meet, exchange, and invent new responses to the economic and political crises of the time. It proposes to use the concept of generation to rethink the history of socialism and to restore the transnational character of this internationalist doctrine in crisis.

The project intends to make visible a forgotten generation, illuminate how political ideas circulate beyond borders, and offer a renewed, European reading of the history of socialism between the wars.

Scientific Objective

The primary objective of the project is to identify and characterize this European socialist generation active in the 1920s and 1930s: its social profiles, trajectories, doctrinal and cultural references, forms of militant engagement, and its political fate during the interwar period. In doing so, the project seeks to fill several gaps in the historiography of European socialism, for which the interwar years remain a blind spot.

First, it proposes to redefine the contours of the “spirit of the thirties,” long associated solely with right-wing nonconformists in France. This transnational socialist generation is in fact a Marxist-leaning variant of the “nouvelles relèves” (the young generation trying to take over from their elders) of the interwar years: to pull European societies out of their crises, they called for a renewal of minds and doctrines and for the affirmation of the regenerative vitality of youth against earlier generations perceived as morally and politically enervated. By analyzing the intellectual and cultural characteristics of this transnational generation, the project will therefore study the expression of this “spirit of the thirties” within

socialist and Marxist doctrine and its legacies in European political culture.

The project also addresses gaps identified in the history of socialist internationalism, notably by scholars such as Patrizia Dogliani and Talbot C. Imlay, by examining central spaces from a new angle: by analyzing the networks of this generation and their performativity, it aims to reassess the idea of a decline in internationalism during this period.

More broadly, since Marx and Marxism were central objects of reflection for this generation, the project contributes to the study of the circulation and reception of Marxism — topics still underexplored for this period and at a transnational scale.

Methodology

The core of this project rests on using the sociological concept of generation as an analytical tool for interwar socialism. Following Karl Mannheim's perspective, a generation is not a mere biological age cohort but a social fact: a group shaped by a shared historical context and by a formative experience — here the Great War and the rupture of socialist unity — that leaves a lasting imprint on its members' trajectories. The project starts from the hypothesis that the political and social context of European socialism between the wars contributed to the formation of several activist groups animated by the same experiences, frustrations, and aspirations, thereby

constituting a European socialist generation seeking doctrinal renewal. Because these experiences cut across European socialism, the generation becomes a transnational analytical instrument — on a par with class or gender. This instrument focuses not on socialism in its party forms but on socialism in its networks, mediations, and circulations, both cause and product of a transnational socialist generational consciousness.

The project pays particular attention to four socialist spaces and their interrelations. France is indispensable: as various studies have shown, the groups of the socialist “nouvelles relèves,” often future neo-socialists, formed an active center of socialist and Marxist “nonconformist” reflection and actively sought to constitute a European International of alternative socialist thought. Belgium constitutes a second essential space, evidenced by intense exchanges between young French and Belgian socialists, the doctrinal role of figures such as Henri de Man, and editorial collaborations. Italy provides a central field: after 1926, the Italian socialist movement in exile reconstituted itself in France and Switzerland, where its militants met the new socialist cadres and developed original analyses of fascism and the crisis of socialism; exile thus became a space of intellectual circulation rich in doctrinal innovation. Austria completes the set: as a center for the diffusion of Otto Bauer’s

	<p>Austro-Marxism and as a European socialist capital, “Red Vienna” (1919–1934) served as a doctrinal model and a training ground for this generation, which gathered there, for example, at the 1929 congress of the International Socialist Youth. The articulation of these four terrains around a precise analysis of a network of militants allows the project to move beyond a comparative approach and to propose a genuinely transnational history of socialism.</p> <p>This transnational, European project is therefore situated within a European chronology of socialism. Opened in 1918 — a moment of crisis and recomposition of the Socialist International — it closes around 1934–1935, when the fascist threat imposed unity on the revolutionary left and rendered this European generation, in search of a third way, inaudible.</p>	
	Salary placement	2300 € gross / month
Requirements		
	Admission requirements	Holding a Master’s Degree
	Eligibility	Subject to the acceptance of the head of the institution, on the proposal of the ED director after consultation with the director of the research team and the thesis supervisor
Application		
		A complete application must contain :

		<p>(1) A personal letter with a brief description of your research interests and motivation</p> <p>(2) A <i>curriculum vitae</i> (CV)</p> <p>(3) <i>Certified copies of grades, diplomas, and documentation of completed academic courses</i></p> <p>(4) Contact information for two references</p>
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