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Fourth International

Call from Brown et al : Reject the draft “Role and Tasks of the FI”

- Fourth International resolutions - World Congresses - 16th World Congress - 2010 - 16th World Congress Discussion - 2010 -

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[Introductory note: The authors of this call are asking all delegates at the 2010 world congress, no matter what position they might take on the document titled “Role and Tasks of the Fourth International,” to vote in favor of the specific motion below. Developing the discussion projected in that motion should be a common task for our entire world movement. And it should be accepted as such by supporters of the RTFI document as well as those of us who disagree with this text. We are also, however, hoping that others who, like ourselves, consider the resolution presented by the IC to be irreparably flawed will join us in voting against it. Ordinarily, under such circumstances, a minority current would submit a counter-draft. We choose not to do so. We do not believe that a counterposed text, drafted by a small minority representing comrades in only a handful of countries, can possibly treat this subject adequately. For that we need a much greater base of experience and collaboration. In addition, we need a counterposed framework within which a new RTFI text can be constructed. We submit the following text to the International Discussion Bulletin, therefore, in an attempt to explain what that alternative framework might be and why it is needed. We hope that a vote rejecting the present draft will then lay the basis for moving forward in order to develop an alternative document that can meet our collective needs.]

* Draft Motion (for the agenda item “Role and Tasks of the Fourth International”): “The World Congress establishes a commission to draft a document outlining the ‘shared strategic vision’ of the Fourth International, plus the impact of this vision on any broader process of building revolutionary organizations on a national and international level today. The IC meeting in 2011 will hold an initial discussion, putting in place a process that encourages section leaderships to contribute comments based on circulation of the relevant texts plus discussions within their organizations.”

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We will vote against the text “Role and Tasks of the Fourth International” and urge others to reject it as well. The document fails to pose the critical questions facing the FI today in a manner that will allow us to really resolve them. It reflects an incorrect understanding of what the FI is and what it ought to be, thereby opening the door to building a second-and-a-half international instead of the revolutionary world movement we so desperately need. In this way, the text before us calls into question the very existence of the FI itself.

The motion we have submitted (see above) attempts to address what is, perhaps, the most glaring flaw in this document which declares: “We expressed it in our own way, from 1992 onwards, in other words in the last two world congresses, with the triptych ‘new period, new program, new party.’” There is, however, no discussion in the text, nor in the general discourse of the FI and its leadership in recent years, about what the limits and contradictions are of this “new” process. Nor is there any consideration about what the implications might be, for all that is new, of that which is not so new, what is described in point 6 of the document as our “shared strategic vision.” What is that vision? How do we work toward and apply it today?

If we cannot formulate a set of ideas, and put them down on paper, explaining what we mean by “our shared strategic vision,” then any reference to such a vision in a document like RTFI is meaningless. In our judgment, serious reference to our “shared strategic vision” requires that we collectively affirm a set of core principles, including at least:

1) We stand for the continued possibility of world socialist revolution and the centrality of the working class in that revolutionary process, along with the need for active alliances between the working class, the specially oppressed, and other groups that are victimized by capitalist society.

2) We affirm the need for the working class and oppressed to maintain their political independence from the

exploiting classes.

3) We advocate and organize to bring about a revolutionary government in which the self-organization of the oppressed can exercise hegemony, with a goal of breaking definitively with the old bourgeois state and constructing a new state based on working-class power. This is counterposed to the idea of a "broad front" of "progressive" forces in which other class interests are allowed to dominate, leaning on the old bourgeois state rather than breaking with it (what the term "Popular Front" correctly refers to).

4) We recognize the absolute necessity of cohering a revolutionary cadre with sufficient understanding of the essential programmatic elements (using this as part of an active political toolbox) and with a sufficient social weight so that when revolution does become an objective possibility the mass energy that is unleashed in society at large can break out of safe channels, leading to the necessary overthrow of the old state power.

5) We attempt to work out an anti-capitalist strategy based on transitional demands and the transitional method.

In addition to these essential programmatic elements that are not discussed in the RTFI document (what is their relationship to the "new program"?), other points need to be included in any text which attempts to develop a serious appreciation of the FI's role and tasks today:

* There is no discussion in the IC draft of the difference between revolutionary organizations and "anti-capitalist" formations understood more broadly, not to mention blocs or parties that we might characterize as "centrist" or "left-reformist." All these quite different kinds of parties or fronts are treated as if the problems posed for revolutionaries are essentially the same when working within them.

* Even if this resolution developed an orientation toward involvement in some kind of regroupment or recomposition process that was appropriately nuanced, taking into account the programmatic elements posed above and other problems that we note here, such an orientation remains an active possibility for only a minority of FI sections today. Most organizations affiliated to the FI are engaged in building independent organizations, and this is, in the overwhelming majority of cases, the appropriate orientation for revolutionary Marxists in these specific countries. RTFI has nothing to say, however, about the importance of this task or how we orient to it.

* Even in cases where we are actually participating in a broader formation of some kind, or have the potential to do so, the uniform evolution of such an organization toward a genuinely revolutionary perspective is hardly guaranteed (and that is an understatement). The political independence of our cadre—and, to the extent required in order to maintain that political independence, some kind of separate organizational formation as well—must be maintained. How else do we prepare for the possibility, even the likelihood judging from recent experiences in Italy and Brazil, of a crisis that results from reformist or centrist elements choosing to support, join, or form a capitalist government? Even in the event of a crisis that is less severe, the existence of a programmatic/organizational pole within the broader anti-capitalist formation, actively organizing around the "shared strategic vision" of the FI is likely to prove decisive. FI sections in country after country have stumbled in recent decades because of a lack of attention to this question. And yet the RTFI text has nothing whatsoever to say about it. We recognize that the answers are rarely simple or easy in such situations, but precisely for that reason the question must be posed and alternative possibilities seriously considered.

* Today we confront the problem of how to maintain our political/organizational independence once again as a result of the formation of the NPA in France. As in other cases, we do not pretend that the answer is simple or easy here. But some answer has to be consciously developed. The authors of these lines are open to hearing a discussion where a range of perspectives might be considered. But we find ourselves unable to conceive of an alternative that

fails to include some kind of current or structure, actively seeking to maintain and develop that cadre, within the NPA, that is committed to the politics of the Fourth international and therefore to the political identity of the French section.

* Generally speaking, then, whether engaged in building our own sections as independent organizations or in some kind of broader formation, the first and most important duty of the FI and its sections is to maintain and expand a revolutionary cadre based on our “shared strategic vision.” This means paying attention to building actual sections of the FI. We are in favor of participating in broader anti-capitalist poles, parties and/or alliances. But this is not a goal in and of itself. It has to be understood as a means toward a far more fundamental goal: building genuinely revolutionary mass parties that can, in turn, be part of a revolutionary mass international. There is no substitute for this as our broad strategic objective. We will never ride the coattails of other forces to the kind of influence within the movements of the oppressed that we hope to achieve. We must work toward that goal based on our own political strength, as a specific current of revolutionaries with our own unique, and essential, contribution to make.

* The same kinds of problems that we note above in terms of national parties also haunts this text in relation to its vision of a “new International,” presumably to replace the FI. Here, too, the distinction between revolutionary, anti-capitalist, centrist, and reformist formations is ignored, as are question related to building a revolutionary-Marxist programmatic pole in the context of such a formation. We are in favor of a vision that is broader than simply the FI as it now stands. We are not, however, in favor of a vision that negates the FI as it now stands, or the programmatic continuity which the FI represents. RTFI is simply open to too many diverse possibilities from this point of view. It is, therefore, totally inadequate as a guide for action.

* There is, finally, no consideration of the role FI groups can and should play in helping to resolve the acute crisis of leadership that confronts partial struggles today—“in the labor movement, around questions of racism and national oppression, gender oppression, equality for women, and/or the rise of overtly fascist movements”—as well as in building the cadres of the FI and the critical mass of its sections. No other political tendency has given any indication that it can become a substitute for the crucial programmatic role revolutionary Marxism has consistently attempted to play, working thereby to solve the crisis of leadership that has plagued the working class and its allies over the last eight decades. This crisis continues to be a key obstacle in the struggles for social change, up to and including the struggle for socialist revolution in today’s world.

All of these deficiencies, taken together, compel us to cast a vote against this text and call on the incoming leadership of the FI to launch a broad discussion that can involve our entire world movement in order to generate a better document. Such a conversation on the real role and tasks of the Fourth International will have to take into account the multiple errors and mistakes that have occurred since 1985 and led, for example, to the disasters of the Mexican section in the 1990s and the Brazilian after 2000. On the basis of such a broad conversation within our ranks, a new document should be developed over the next several years which can chart a road forward for our international and its sections.

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