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15th World Congress

# At the heart of the anti-capitalist combat...

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**The Fourth International held its 15th congress in early February 2003 in Belgium. Delegates and observers, representing organizations from 40 countries debated and adopted resolutions on the world political situation (which also included a balance sheet of Stalinism and resistances to capitalist globalization), the role and tasks of the Fourth International, a new Preamble to the Statutes as well as a reform of the Statutes, and two programmatic documents: 'Lesbian and Gay Liberation' and 'Ecology and Socialism'. The Congress elected a new leadership, the International Committee, which will meet at least once a year and will choose from its ranks an Executive Bureau. The two have been substantially renewed and rejuvenated.**

If one wished to sum up this Congress, one could qualify it thus: at the heart of the anti-capitalist combat, a policy relaunch, opening, regroupment and repositioning.

The ambiance was warm, the behaviour studious, the debates passionate, the attitudes responsible: nearly eight years after the previous Congress (July 1995), there were reunions of 'old timers' conscious of having 'kept the faith' faced with defeats and mounting barbarism; at the same time, a new generation, already tempered in the rise of international mobilizations and ready to take over, was actively present. The new perspectives affirmed have recontextualised and relativised the old debates, tendencies and factions to the point that the political documents put to the discussion and to the vote, entirely focused on the future, were adopted by a very broad majority.

## At the heart of the anti-capitalist combat

The militants and the national organizations of the Fourth International are today at the heart of the anti-capitalist combat. This is not a recent fact; with others (but they were very few) they were, as of the turning point of 1989-91, involved in initiating international campaigns which were ignored at the time but would lead to the mobilizations of Seattle and Genoa, the Social Forums of Porto Alegre and Florence and the world rising of the people against the imperialist war.

It was this that 'saved' our current from marginalization and sectarianism; linking up with what was 'moving' in the field of the exemplary struggles for emancipation, building the mass movement (against the prevailing winds and tides), fighting for unity, getting involved in the most advanced ideological debates, all this was very much in our tradition.

That, plus an internal opening up within our organizations and the International where debates, all kinds of debates, were possible, including the most heterodox. Because when no groundswell imposes itself, when the old world unwinds and a new emancipatory prospect mobilizing the popular masses is not immediately apparent, there are no more obvious things, there are only the dogmas that survive (let's remind ourselves of some of these new questions: Zapatism, the terrible 'national question' in Yugoslavia, the role of the 'international institutions' vis-à-vis genocide and massacres, the structural weakening of the wage earning class and its organizations, the 'end of History' and so on). The choice for an organization which claims to be revolutionary Marxist becomes very simple: to open up to the outside and to give a free run to the internal dialectic (with its inevitable batch of heterodoxy, doubt and fragmentation), or to crush debate through the 'dogmatization' of analyses and the theory, to impose the 'correct' political line, to reinforce activist discipline, to crystallize an 'infallible leadership'. No revolutionary organization emerged unscathed from this neoliberal counter-revolutionary period. All had to deal with defeat. All had to adapt.

None escaped internal crises - inevitably. We have the conviction of having made the right choice. There before us are realities and problems.

## Rise of the mass movement, rebirth of the anti-capitalist forces

The main difficulty is taking the measurement of what is really happening in the world today. The 15th Congress noted "the end of the 1990s constitutes a turning point in the world political situation. A new phase opens which puts a radical revival of the activity, program, strategy and organization of the labour and social movement on the agenda". [1] Before putting this at the heart of our activity, our International had scrupulously scanned the hesitant birth of what was going to become the movement against capitalist globalization, also called the 'global No' movement or 'the movement of movements'. Thus, the text on 'Resistances', written before Seattle, had prepared our militants, our national organizations and the International as such for a change in the 'subjective factor'. From the beginning, there was a quasi-unanimity in our ranks for saying: we have to be there, help it to be built, while respecting - without sectarianism or arrogance - its development. From Seattle (December 1999) to the historic date of February 15, 2003 (the world rising of the people against the war), passing by Porto Alegre, Genoa and Florence, a dynamic of total refoundation is underway, of an international social movement from which the multiple potentialities remain to emerge, specify and organize themselves.

This new and powerful dynamic is bolstered by three powerful contradictions: the brutal military, economic and anti-democratic offensive of imperialism and big business is aware of the obstacle which it now faces in this new social movement which has consolidated itself and which was able, in three years, to create a 'single world front' against the war, putting all the governments of Capital under pressure; the persistent and worrying lack of synchrony between the rise of this movement and the persistent weakness of the movement of wage earners, which is only very slowly recovering its capacities of struggle and organization, due to an unfavourable relationship of forces after the defeats of the period 1985-95; finally, the politically unprecedented historic crisis of the forces which dominated the labour and popular movement (social democracy, post-Stalinism, social populism) throughout the 20th century, with the politically organized anti-capitalist alternative remaining very weak. Short of a cataclysmic event not to be ruled out (a war with uncontrolled effects, a collapse of the world economy), our "strategic task of defeating the 'social neoliberalism' that still rallies a majority in the workers' and popular movement, and of (re)building the movement on an anti-capitalist, internationalist, ecologist and feminist basis. This battle turns around two questions, opposition to war and opposition to neoliberalism. [2]

The current crisis of the workers' movement cannot be resolved by the simple reinforcement of the revolutionary Marxist organizations, because the phase which is opening up is not only characterized by the weakness of the revolutionary left which remains very much in the minority, but also by the dramatic retreat, on a mass scale, of socialist consciousness, anti-employer demands, militant commitment, trade union organizations. Moreover, the break in the subjective factor also leaves its mark of enormous radicalization of the youth. This latter is in the process of establishing a 'political generation' through its own social experience at all levels, notably by the biggest mobilizations that history has known.

This heteroclitite unit, which prefigures a major and total renewal of the social movement, requires a suitable proposition. It can only be a gathering of all the forces of opposition, all the radical political currents, in a new political formation (party, movement, coalition, alliance), both pluralist and anti-capitalist, a combat force and a place of discussion, an electoral formation and an extra-parliamentary movement, interlocutor of the social movement and factor of clarification vis-a-vis all the other political currents, reformist and social liberal. In such a formation, revolutionary Marxists do not practice 'entryism' with a secret or avowed goal of passing as quickly as possible to a vanguard 'revolutionary party' equipped with a revolutionary program. They are the co-initiators, co-organizers,

co-leaders of this broad party in order to share the experiences of the current struggle and to progress together towards a mass anti-capitalist party, capable of fighting for socialism.

## For a new mass International

The Fourth International formulates proposals which respond to three levels of activity and organization, and which bear as much on the national as international levels:

1 The international movement against globalization is marked by a consciousness, methods of struggle, programmatic proposals and international structures. It points, from its very existence, in the direction of a new International.

It excites a deserved enthusiasm among youth whose political consciousness is linked with internationalism. It evokes historic memories for those who have been or still are organized in a structure of this type.

"The construction of the Internationals that have existed in history has been linked each time to new tasks linked to large-scale social and political developments. This new political cycle of reorganization poses from the beginning the problem of a new mass revolutionary anti-capitalist/anti-imperialist International" [3] says the resolution on the role and tasks of the Fourth International. And note well: "We cannot imagine the qualitative step towards the creation of a new International without an important contribution from these new forces". [4] However, "a process of clarification and differentiation (...) under the impact of great political events in the world" [5] is necessary.

This new International, or at least a first step on the road to its construction, will emerge from the current movements and mobilizations. It will not resemble any of its predecessors, and certainly not the revolutionary Marxist party-based internationals. It will be the massive 'spontaneous' response to the current historically unprecedented global despotic reign of capitalism, and its anchoring will be its internationalism and intuitive anti-capitalism; but also its very great heterogeneity from every viewpoint. It will certainly be different from its five predecessors: The Internationalist Communist League of 1848, the First International (1864-1876), the Second International (1889-1914-), the Communist International (the 'Third', 1919-1943), the Fourth International (founded in 1938).

Our objective is not to make a short term political-organizational raid on the global justice movement according to the lines of fracture already perceptible in it so as to impose on it a political organization. On the contrary, we must build it, strengthen it as a combat movement *sui generis*, and realize all its potentialities on different levels: as socio-political movement, as space of discussion and elaboration, as bearer of several autonomous campaigns (Tobin tax, cancellation of the Third World debt, defence of public services, against modern slavery, as gathering of the social movements (unions, unemployed, ecologists), as single world front (the anti-war mobilization). We do not abandon discussion, debate and if it happens, political combat.

For we can only note tactical and strategic dissensions within the movement. This latter is not born from the self-activity of the wage earning class, is not connected spontaneously to this latter. In the same way, it does not lead, for the moment, spontaneously to a political formation, on the contrary there is an 'anti-political' mistrust, very widespread and even cultivated. It is with this double challenge, this double and intolerable contradiction with which the movement is confronted in its will to win. How to impose the strong claims of the 'movement of movements'; and, beyond that, how to stop capitalist globalization and substitute for it another society? For that a force in society is needed, which is none other than the mass of the exploited and oppressed on a world scale, whose decisive core is located within American and European imperialism. We need one or more political formations with a mass character which are in the social movement and which propose a strategy. Any combat until the end for a great demand that is

social, economic or democratic, inevitably leads, for its realization, to the political-institutional level, that is the level of the state. This is politics in the strong sense of the term, which implies taking a positions and entering the fray on electoral questions, governmental policy, the relationship with existing parties and a strategy leading to this 'other possible world'. Politics is, in fact, omnipresent, but hidden! That is not healthy. Because the parties exist, with their history, their political culture, their program, their tactics, their insertion in society, movements and institutions.

Obviously, a political clarification on a mass scale is underway, around three axes, of which two directly affect the living and working conditions of millions of men and women: the policy of war (armed imperialism) the neoliberal policy (the anti-social war), and a third, within the movement itself, which touches on the relationship of the political parties with the 'new social movement' and, more generally, the movement of mass emancipation. That implies a clarification on two fronts, but on different levels: a political combat to dispute the hegemony of the social liberal left; a fraternal political debate within the radical, revolutionary left against sectarianism and 'vanguardism'.

**2** For almost ten years, the Fourth International has worked with other currents of the non-sectarian radical left, for a broad and pluralist anti-capitalist regrouping in order to beat the hegemony of the social-liberal left. Logically enough with the movement of capital, the new anti-capitalist political movement will more quickly find cohesion on a regional/continental level. In Latin America, the Sao Paulo Forums, now in decline, were an example. Recently, meetings took place to start again a process of convergence between anti-capitalist/anti-imperialist currents in several countries. In Europe, the European Anti-Capitalist Left has met twice a year since March 2000 (at the time of the EU summit meetings). It gathers representative parties and movements, such as the Red-Green Alliance (Denmark), the Left Bloc (Portugal), the LCR (France), the SSP (Scotland), the Socialist Alliance (England), the British SWP, and so on. Recently, the PRC (Italy) has participated, while remaining in the European United Left, the alliance of the Communist Parties. In Asia, at the initiative of the DSP (Democratic Socialist Party, Australia), Asia-Pacific Solidarity Conference gathers, every two years, a very broad arc of radical, anti-imperialist parties and social movements.

These are promising but still fragile developments and in any event too different to pass directly onto a world level. That doesn't rule out exploring ways of world meetings in connection with the development of the social movement.

**3** Taking account of our points of view on the movement for global justice and the priority given anti-capitalist regroupments, our Congress opened the way to debates, initiatives, meetings with the currents of the revolutionary left to test the convergences, without that leading to a new structure in the short term.

We conceive these three levels of intervention (political clarification linked to the 'movement of movements', pluralist anti-capitalist regroupments, dialogue with the international revolutionary left) as distinct platforms but all contributing to a new mass anti-capitalist International.

## Relaunch and reposition the Fourth International

Between the 14th and 15th Congress, seven years and seven months have gone by and a rupture of historic dimensions has occurred at all levels of society.

Our organization has faced with difficulty but with success the 'descent into hell' of the 1985-95 period and the recent rebirth of the movement of emancipation. Such a process has stimulated reflection and decision. Thus, our Congress has proceeded both to a relaunch and a political-organizational repositioning of the Fourth International.

After the long process of weakening, it is in the first place necessary to strengthen our organization: the Fourth International as it is today. Without this collective tool for reflection and action, politics is not possible. It amounts to a thoughtful reconstruction of our leadership structures, mechanisms of coordination and public intervention, our educational schools, seminars and press. That involves a double correction.

We have certainly, and for a long time, suffered from a weakness in relation to the definition of our own organizational objectives, our own working procedure, the integration and structuring of members' work, formal and political training, public profile, propaganda and agitation. This problem relates to another weakness: "there is a significant gap between our underlying influence within movements and the political and organizational strengthening of our organizations." [6]

The answer is not only propaganda for socialism (in its various aspects: strategy, transitional anti-capitalist demands, model society, history of exploitation and oppression, the workers' movement). The answer consists in showing that the Fourth International 'has a specific political function to fulfil in day-to-day activity, mass work and the movements. This requires in particular more regular, sustained propaganda for our ideas, more consistent agitation, a commitment to political and strategic debate, and a reinforced organizational system to back all this up.' [7]

The problem is certainly organizational. However, it is not just that: it is the capacity to reflect and define political objectives that hold in the short and medium term. This revival of the Fourth International does not lead to a sectarian self-assertion but to a step of opening, dialogue, collaboration and unit regrouping: "Our principal task as the Fourth International consists in contributing to a vast reorganization of the labour and social movement on world scale with our perspective the constitution of a new internationalist, pluralist, revolutionary, militant force with a mass impact". [8] This assertion implies a significant revision of what the Fourth International could carry out. It is not "the world party of socialist revolution" (the objective it adopted at the time of its founding), nor even the central nucleus of such a future party. The 65 years that separate us from this proclamation have not been marked by a process of gathering of the revolutionary forces, but by ruptures, separated routes, and splits. We are one Trotskyist current among others, one revolutionary current among others. The chapter is closed when the Fourth International could have the perspective of being carried to the head of the revolutionary process, with the help of a huge militant effort, a correct analysis and a successful battle inside the Trotskyist movement. We have the pride to think that we traversed a difficult historical period while being able to assert this past and that we have a significant role to play, a great political responsibility. But we have the conviction that it will be through a systematic collaboration with other radical non-sectarian currents and, especially, with the new forces that the new parties and the new International will attract. This repositioning is reflected in our unity proposals. It has also led to a rewriting of our statutes. In a new International, the Fourth International will be one current among others. It will definitely involve a certain continuity. But the major feature is a refoundation on a new program whose renewal, obviously, will be carried through on the basis of a new social and ideological constellation.

*The 15th World Congress of the Fourth International was held in Europe from February 8-14, 2003. More than 200 participants included delegations from sections, sympathising groups and permanent observers from the following countries: Argentina, Austria, Australia, Belgium, Brazil, Britain, Canada - English Canada and Quebec, Denmark, Ecuador, Euskadi, France, Germany, Greece, Hong Kong, India, Italy, Ireland, Japan, Lebanon, Luxemburg, Martinique, Morocco, Mexico, Netherlands, Norway, Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Puerto Rico, Spanish state, Sri Lanka, Sweden, Switzerland, Uruguay, and the USA.*

*The delegations from Algeria, Chile, Israel, New Zealand, Senegal, South Africa, Tunisia and Turkey were unable to participate, due to visa or other practical problems.*

*Among the guests at the Congress were organisations and comrades from Australia (Democratic Socialist Party), Colombia (Presente por el socialismo), Corsica (A Manca Nazionali), France (Lutte Ouvriere), Britain (Socialist*

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Workers Party), Greece (Diethnistiki Ergatiki Aristera), Italy (Partito de Rifondazione Comunista), Poland, Scotland (International Socialist Movement), South Korea, Taiwan, the USA (Socialist Party and Freedom Socialist Party) and Hugo Blanco from Peru whose [greetings are published here](#).

The Congress received messages from guest organisations that were unable to attend from the following countries: Argentina (Movimento al Socialismo), Mauritius (Lalit), Pakistan (Labour Party Pakistan), Uruguay (Corriente de Izquierda).

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[1] Resolution entitled [A new world situation](#), adopted by the Congress. IV will publish all the resolutions adopted in a [special issue](#).

[2] Resolution entitled [Role and tasks of the Fourth International](#), adopted by the Congress.

[3] op. cit.

[4] op. cit.

[5] op. cit.

[6] op. cit.

[7] op. cit.

[8] op. cit.