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Europe

Success for Conference of European anti-capitalist left

- IV Online magazine - 2001 - IV327 - January 2001 -

Publication date: Friday 5 January 2001

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A European conference involving a series of parties and movements of the radical left was held in Paris on December 4-5, to coincide with the European Union (EU) Summit under French presidency.

Following a first meeting of this kind in Lisbon in Spring 2000, this one was convened by the Ligue communiste révolutionnaire (LCR, French section of the Fourth International).

The following groups replied to the invitation: the Red Electoral Alliance (RV, Norway), the Red-Green Alliance (RGA, Denmark), the Scottish Socialist Party (SSP), the London Socialist Alliance (LSA) and the Socialist Alliances (England, Wales), the Socialist Workers' Party (SWP, Britain), La Gauche (Luxembourg), the Left Bloc (Portugal), Zutik (Euskadi), Espacio alternativo (Spain), SolidariteS (Switzerland), OeDP (Turkey), and the Movement of Patriotic Unity (Turkish Cypriot community). Zutik, Espacio Alternativo and the OeDP could not be present, but indicated their agreement with the goal of the meeting and the proposed declaration. The MPU, whose office had just been blown up by the Turkish army, was represented by a comrade from the Cypriot Left from the Greek community. The Socialist Party of England and Wales, (the former Militant Tendency) which forms part of an international organisation, the Committee for a Workers' International (CWI), sent an observer. Lutte Ouvriere (France) turned down the invitation.

The objectives of the meeting and the criteria for invitation had been set by the comrades of the Portuguese Left Bloc at their counter-summit in Lisbon: to seize the occasion of the EU summit to take a position starting from the concrete policy of the EU, and contribute to the emergence of an anti-capitalist current clearly distinct from social democracy, the Greens and the Communist Parties which support a policy of social neo-liberalism. To give strength and credibility to this approach, it was necessary to begin on the basis of bringing together parties and movements which are representative electorally or influential on the trade union and social levels.

Hinted at here there was also, of course, the idea of a broad pluralist recomposition, breaking radically with sectarianism and involving the coming together of currents and organisations whose origin, history, programme and practice have long diverged but who have understood that it is by their unity that they can occupy the political space opened up by the neo-liberal degeneration of social democracy and the collapse of Stalinism.

A closer examination brings out this pluralist aspect very well. The ex-Maoist currents are very strong in the Norwegian RV, the Portuguese Left Bloc (the UDP) and the Turkish OeDP. In Denmark, the CP undoubtedly contributes the most militants to the RGA, and in Luxembourg, it is by far the strongest element in La Gauche. The strong visibility of the organised currents should not obscure the role of "unorganised" militants and personalities in initiating or cementing unity. This is the case for example in England where the likes of Ken Loach or Tariq Ali have contributed strongly. It was all the more indispensable because what is at stake is not unifying revolutionaries, but winning entire layers of the militant left (trade union, social and political) still attached to neo-liberal social democracy, and also the Greens and the social democratised CPs.

Remember also that the Trotskyist international current is for its part very diversified, with the International Socialists, the CWI and the Fourth International.

The concrete agenda of the Paris meeting was aimed at coming up with a political declaration and a common press conference. But the LCR, as host, had tried to broaden the agenda in terms of the coming events in the struggle against capitalist globalisation, such as the World Social Forum in January 2001 in Porto Alegre and a debate on the

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Charter of Fundamental Rights in which the European Federation of Trade Unions (EFTU) was deeply involved; it had initially refused to support any text which was regressive at the social level only to fall into line subsequently. This debate found a notable echo in the French trade union movement, heavily mobilised on the streets of Nice.

The most essential thing, the real step forward, was the common declaration. Political will allowed agreement on such a declaration despite the debates which marked the meeting.

First, the very heterogeneous construction which the EU represents - grouping national states under the aegis of a supranational proto-state - weighs differently in each country on society, the social movement and the political currents. The anti-capitalists and revolutionaries are no exception. Internationalists in general, they also have to practically resolve the big strategic questions and problems which stem from two centuries (or more) of development of the bourgeois state.

For the radical organisations of the Scandinavian countries (and in part Britain), the struggle against the EU passes through the dissolution of the latter, with a succession of "no's" and a final exit of each country creating a vast crisis in the EU opening the horizon of a broader international co-operation.

An opposite strategy is advanced by organisations in countries currently outside the EU (such as Cyprus, Switzerland, Turkey): they propose the entry of their countries into the EU, not for the advantages that it will bring for their population and working class, but so as to join the common struggle with the social movement mobilised inside the EU.

In the countries situated at the "heart" of the EU, a fight for complete withdrawal would simply not be understood: there, it is about fighting the EU through a united struggle for common European demands on the social, economic, environmental, political, cultural levels. Which also involves alternative institutional propositions. The opening of a crisis of the EU will take place through this common struggle and a radically democratic approach which takes the constituent process away from the governments.

The second discussion at the meeting focused on the formulation of a democratic demand for self-determination: who will decide - the peoples or the working classes - whether it is a question of entry in the EU (the countries of Eastern Europe) or the case of a major institutional crisis of the EU?

It is not a question of coming up with an abstract and eternal response, but rather the political dynamic at work and in the current phase of the class struggle, the relationship of forces, the situation of the workers' and social movement.

On these two basic strategic and burning questions the meeting opened the discussion without reaching any conclusion. We did not seek slapdash compromise formulae. The absence of any democratic proposal of self-determination allowing a common activity in Europe is certainly the big weakness of the document. From this fact, the strongly critical analysis of the EU - genuinely shared by all - remains, for the moment, suspended in mid-air, without political and practical perspective.

Nonetheless, we are not talking about Euro-scepticism or a nationalist drawing back.

Indeed the press communiqué came out in favour of a Europe which was social, democratic, and based on values of peace and solidarity - a democratic socialist society, and gave form to this perspective by sketching out an anti-capitalist social programme. Thus this Conference is in step with the left wing of the social and trade union movement in Europe. This is the first very positive point. The second is that faced with the decisions of the Nice

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summit, other areas of common action are sketched out, such as the struggle against Euro-militarism, for the free circulation of persons (immigrants) and their full citizenship, and against the EU as active factor of capitalist globalisation.

The discussion, at the end of the Conference, revealed a unanimous desire to continue. How? With what short and medium term objective? Through what methods of work?

Should we speed up the pace? Deepen and strengthen the organic links? Let's learn to walk before we can run said one participant. Another replied, Yes, but let's decide to walk immediately and in the right direction. The "balance sheets and perspectives" of the parties which participated will weigh heavily on the orientation to be taken. The next summit of the EU (at Gothenburg in Sweden) offers a new opportunity.

Afterwards will come Brussels (December 2001) which, through its geographical situation in the EU, will create the possibility of forcefully affirming the existence of a European pluralist anti-capitalist current fighting to break the workers' and social movement from the dominant social neo-liberalism.