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France

New anti-capitalist party gets underway!

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Three hundred committees were represented by a little under 800 delegates. There were also a good number of observers so in all there were a thousand people. There were about 40% women and a majority of non-members of the LCR.

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The agenda of this meeting was in two parts. The first part, a discussion in plenary session allowed the participants to measure the scope of process underway and for some sixty delegates to speak about their local experiences, their struggles, their questions. As it was a first meeting this stage was inevitable and despite the length the delegates listened attentively.

The second part of the agenda was work in commissions on different themes: internationalism, feminism, ecology, workplaces, local neighbourhoods, casualised work, name for the new party, website, youth, LGBT, common statement of the meeting, organising the process. Written reports will be produced by each commission, all of which worked in a very constructive way with a lot of people attending.

The latter two, on the common statement and organisation of the process, reported on their conclusions to the whole meeting at the end because they were responsible for bringing proposals for the next stage of the process. The adoption of a common statement means that the appeal for a new party no longer comes from the LCR alone but from the constituent process itself (read here).

The other commission discussed at length the next stages of the process, membership and finances, the tasks of the provisional national committee and its composition.

Three dates were agreed: the responsibility of the new party for one day during the LCR's traditional summer university which will be devoted to the question of the new party, a new national meeting of the committees in the autumn, at the end of October or beginning of November, and a founding conference at the end of January 2009. Not too soon in order to leave time for the process which is still in full swing to develop, not too late because we have to move forward. The founding conference itself is only a stage and not a finishing point.

In the perspective of the national meeting and congress it seemed important to concretise involvement in the process and to start to deal with the question of finances. This is why the commission proposed the issuing of founding membership cards, with a flat rate contribution up to the congress and a variable rate according to income afterwards. This will make it possible to have a clearer idea of the number of people involved and to move towards a system of representativity in national meetings on the basis of numerical reality.

However this proposal rejects any idea that we are closing the door and simply organising the people already involved, the constituent process is open until the congress. It is not intended to adopt a rigid form of structure implying that the last one in closes the door behind him or her but to think of the hundreds and thousands of people who are going to join the process before the founding congress.

It was also decided not to give any indication about intermediate forms of structure between the local and the national: the committees will do as they think appropriate for their political needs. It would be out of the question to impose any form of departmental or regional structure from above on to a process that is moving at a very different pace in different places.

The other important question was that of the provisional national committee, formed to progressively take over the tasks taken on up to now by the LCR national leadership. This is a decisive stage which it was possible to move into given the dynamic demonstrated by the national meeting. The type of committee – no system of mandates given the very recent creation of most of the committees – is transitional and representative of a process which is still developing.

Responsible for coordinating and stimulating the process from now until the next meeting, this committee has work to do. In particular it has to ensure the circulation and the distribution of information and prepare the congress which could be organised around three documents: one on functioning, a first programmatic document (even if not everything will be decided at the congress and the discussion will continue on a number of questions), and a document on the political conjuncture which indicates the orientations of the new party in the current situation.

The composition of the national initiative committee provoked a lot of debate and discussion. But we reached broad agreement on the candidates which we can schematically say are in four groups. The majority component is the representatives of committees, non-LCR except for two exceptions. There will be about 35 once all the discussions have finished, 25 are sure for the moment. Three observers represent the Faction of Lutte Ouvrière and Gauche Révolutionnaire, we have indicated that they are for the moment ready to participate in the process but reserve judgement on what will be the final outcome of their participation. The LCR is represented by its Political Bureau of 21 members, there are also the two LCR representatives of committees. The youth committees are represented by six people, three members of the LCR or JCR, three who aren't. There should be as many women as men in the committee.

The NPA in figures

by François Duval

There are today throughout the country between 300 and 400 committees some of which are still being created. The process is therefore still in full development and this will be the case at least up to the autumn, undoubtedly up to the congress in fact. It is difficult at this stage to say how many people are involved given that many committees are only just beginning to stabilise.

But at this first stage the balance sheet is way beyond our initial hopes and that where the process is already well under way the relationship between the numbers coming from the LCR and the overall ratio is 1:3. There are about 35% women overall. Most committees have been formed on a geographical basis but there are also forty-odd youth committees and some committees based on sector or workplace are developing.

Some 250 people from the Paris regional undertook the practical tasks necessary to make sure everything ran smoothly. They are to be congratulated for their efficiency.