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Fifteenth World Congress

Introductory Report On The World Political Situation

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We should start by noting a marked change in relation to the 14th Congress of the International in June 1995. That congress took place in a situation marked by the collapse of the "actually existing socialist" regimes and the restoration of capitalism in that region of the world, by political and social defeats in a number of European countries and the pressure of the defeats of revolutionary movements in Latin America. The 2003 congress took place in a quite different political situation, marked at our level by the growth of the anti-globalization movement and social resistances in a series of countries. This is a new political and ideological context favourable to the politicization of sections of society and social movements. Aside from the lifting of the historical burden of Stalinism, the conjunction in 1995 of the neo-liberal offensive and the collapse of the Eastern bloc countries engendered a context of social, political and ideological defeats. Today there is a politico-ideological change - resistances and politicization - that points towards deeper changes in social, economic and political relationships of forces. What are these changes?

1 War, instability and new contradictions

[<https://www.internationalviewpoint.org/IMG/jpg/28trotsky.jpg>]

The ruling classes are unable to stabilize a new world order and globalized capitalism is generating new contradictions: the war against Iraq testifies once more to the disorder of the world situation.

1.1 The neo-liberal offensive and the opening of new markets in the former Eastern bloc have not led to a new phase of lasting growth of the capitalist economy. There is at the same time a crisis of over-accumulation of capital - capital is not profitable - and a crisis of overproduction shown by the overcapacity of production and company failures - more in 2001-02 than in the previous 20 years. This weighs on the rate of profit. This is the fundamental explanation for the change of conjuncture in the USA that preceded the stock market crash in hi-tech industries. The periods of growth are limited and the periods of recession in the USA or of economic slowdown in Europe are stronger. Countries like Argentina and Uruguay are collapsing. The current phase of capitalism is sharpening inequalities, misery and poverty in the advanced capitalist countries and in the rest of the planet.

1.2 Globalization is military globalization. Over the last ten years US imperialism has initiated a series of wars - each with its specificities - whose goal is to consolidate US hegemony. This also points to changes within the US economic apparatus where the oil multinationals as well as the military-industrial complex have gained a decisive place, leading to a relaunch of the arms drive, the explosion of the military budget and the aggressive orientation of US imperialism. The goal of these international: the politico-military strategic domination of the USA over the world, including other imperialist powers and the control of the resources - notably oil - of the whole planet. It is in this framework that the Israel-Palestine conflict should be understood. But the new qualitative element - in particular in relation to the Gulf War in 1991, the Balkan war or the war in Afghanistan, is the emergence of inter-imperialist contradictions within the US ruling class and above all between a section of the European bourgeoisies and the US. If these contradictions deepen this will open a new configuration of international politics.

1.3 The conjunction of these elements (economic crisis, bankruptcies such as that of Enron, restructuring of major financial and industrial multinationals, stock market crash, collapse of countries like Argentina) has led to a political and ideological crisis of neoliberalism and a questioning of institutions like the IMF. This has led to an imperialist counter-offensive to maintain the goals of neo-liberal policy while seeking a consensus with the leaderships of the social movements and trade unions. This is the orientation of the supporters of "dialogue between Davos and Porto Alegre" (a "third way" which would overcome the antagonism between Davos and Porto Alegre) or the effort to find a

consensus on the pensions questions - as there is now in France. This counter-offensive demonstrates, despite the internal contradictions, the political room for manoeuvre of the ruling classes and the ability of the system to function and maintain itself.

2 The strong trends at work and the resistances to globalization

2.1 In the mid and end 1990s saw changes in the relationship of forces between the classes. The international contradiction of capitalist globalization also provoked social and political reactions of a significant scope. This was expressed by mobilizations of sectors of wage-workers: winter 1995 in France, the Spanish and Italian general strikes, the struggles and resistances in a number of countries in Latin America (December 2001 in Argentina, the mobilization against privatizations in Bolivia, the Venezuelan crisis, the Lula victory). The gigantic mobilizations of the anti-war movement, particularly in the US and in Britain also express this change. One of the tasks of the International must be in an effort of analysis and synthesis of the dynamic of these struggles, of these new social movements, of the central place of self-organization of the type of social and political demands.

2.2 The anti-globalization movement is the partial expression of this evolution of the relationship of forces. Its extension and its radicalization, notably among young people - a radicalization unequalled since the 1960s/70s - demonstrate a potential for resistance, which is very important starting point for rebuilding and relaunching a new workers' movement.

2.3 However, these changes do not change the dominant trends of the last twenty years. The neo-liberal offensive is continuing: flexibilization, casualization of the labour force, increasing fragmentation of the working class, deregulation, privatizations, tax policies openly favouring the wealthier, pressure on wages, drop in buying power for the working classes. These social retreats, which have been confirmed again by the bankruptcies and thousands of redundancies, remind us of the real relationship of forces.

2.4 Over and above this social relationship of forces we also have to measure the full set of relations between capital and labour, between countries, in other words all the social and political relations dominated by the world capitalist system. We should note the offensive of the ruling classes in the building of the European Union, as in the Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA-ALCA). We should not forget that overall the wagedworkers are on the defensive. Although there are partial struggles in giant countries - like the USA, Russia, China - there is very low unionization, and very little, or none, political representations of the workers. In other countries of the Arab region or Asia, the combined crisis of Stalinism, nationalism and reformism has led to the development of Islamic currents which, over and above the analysis of a particular current, represent a retreat in the political consciousness of the masses of these countries. Finally we should underline the differing rhythms between social mobilization and rebuilding an anti-capitalist class-consciousness. What dominates today in a series of countries is still the decomposition of the traditional workers' movement, de-unionization, and the drop in membership of the traditional left parties. The whole of the workers' movement, including revolutionaries, is still paying for the defeats of the last century, in particular the disaster of Stalinism. Building a new revolutionary perspective will take time.

3 A new historical phase for the workers' movement

3.1 Today we are in a transitional situation between the end of a whole historical phase of the workers' movement and the emergence of a new cycle - marked by the end of Stalinism, the social-liberal transformation of social democracy and the emergence of new social and political forces. This process is just starting

3.2 The fundamental reasons of social-democracy's conversion to social-liberalism is the combination of its growing integration into the top layers of the state and the economic and financial capital apparatus, and adaptation to the

neoliberal transformations of capitalism. The sharp increase in privatizations, the deregulations of social relations, the reduction of the public sphere, the austerity wage policies undermine the bases of Keynesian policies at a national level or, for example, in a European framework. The participation in governmental experiments has increased these changes. In a series of countries we are seeing a separation of the popular classes from the traditional left. Nevertheless these qualitative transformations are not a finished process. An analysis of the reality of each party is needed. All links to the history and the reality of the workers' movement have not been erased. The Socialist Parties cannot be assimilated to rightwing parties.

3.3 In the countries marked by the reality of mass Communist parties, the collapse or rapid decline of these parties is a major political fact. The end of the USSR has removed all historical functionality. With the exception of the party of Communist Refoundation in Italy (which at this stage signals the positive reconversion of sectors of the communist movement in Italy), the crisis of the CPs has not produced, more than ten years after the fall of the USSR, currents or organizations situated in a democratic unitive class-struggle perspective. There are either currents that have adopted the line of a strategic alliance with social-democracy - the French CP, the Spanish CP, the German PDS - or currents attached to a Stalinist or neo-Stalinist nostalgia that reject democratic and unitive concepts. We should not forget the former Eastern bloc the conversion of sectors of the bureaucracy into a capitalist class. Our orientation is to encourage dialogue and joint action in order to bring forth currents that go beyond this dual dead-end, and choose a unitive, democratic and anti-capitalist path.

3.4 This crisis of the currents that have dominated the international workers' movement - social democracy and Stalinism - does not mean the end of all radical reformism, neo-reformism or nationalism. On the contrary, we see the emergence of the radical neo-reformism: in both a series of countries - Brazil or Venezuela for example - or within the anti-globalization movement. Thousands of activists are opposing the neo-liberal offensive and having their first political experiences in a situation still marked by the effects of the defeats of the last century, by the limits of the self-activity of the masses and the weakness of the anti-capitalist alternative. This is laying the basis for the development of this radical neo-reformism. These currents do not have their roots in traditional social-democratic or Stalinist reformism. They express transitional phenomena in the reorganization of the workers' movement. There is a battle to make clarifications and differentiations and prevent a right-wing crystallization in the framework of state or para-state institutions.

4 Our responsibilities, elements of an orientation

4.1 This new situation in the movement, this historical transition, opens up spaces for radical or revolutionary currents and organizations which have "held out" by maintaining a perspective of radical transformation of society and an orientation of integration in the real movement of the class struggle, in other words, non-sectarian. For revolutionary Marxists this historical transition demands wide-ranging political and cultural transformations. We were born and functioned for years as an opposition to Stalinism. Often this meant we had to intervene by proxy: we demanded of others that they formed a united front or did this or that. Stalinism is no longer present, social-liberal transformation has given revolutionary organizations new, this time direct, responsibilities. We must build our own organizations or broad anti-capitalist parties and also rebuild trade unions, associations, in other words participate fully in the reorganization of the peoples and social movements. This is not "cultivating their own profile" as Marx said of the sectarians but defending a programme that shows revolutionaries do not have "interests separate from those of the working class".

4.2 This requires applying the method of the transitional programme: starting from the demands of immediate struggles but integrating - the new element of the period - a series of strategic and programmatic questions which shape the main lines of a democratic and social anti-capitalist action programme. This renewal of strategic and programmatic debates is expressed in the discussions of the anti-globalization movement ("Is another world possible? We should say which one.") A strategic marker in the sense that although we cannot define the practical steps in the conquest of power for the period to come - and thus have finished formulae - we can base ourselves

both on the experiences and the discussions of the anti-globalization movement in order to pose a series of questions:

– Strategic questions: a unitive orientation in the mass struggles and in the social movements, the central place of self-organization, the refusal to participate in social-liberal governments, the need to break with the capitalist system, the rejection of imperialist wars.

– Programmatic questions: the demand for democracy at all levels as opposed to the capitalist market, the logic of social needs to replace that of capitalist profit. Thus, in a series of countries, we have to in a series of key sectors (health, education, democratic rights) the logic of defence of elementary rights. We can even use the Universal Declaration of Human Rights against the neoliberal logic which undermines these elementary rights. This requires new thinking about national sovereignty in dominated countries. Against the FTAA, faced with the looting of financial markets in a country like Argentina or against the colonization strategy of imperialism in certain areas (for example Iraq), the defence of national sovereignty has a directly anti-imperialist dimension. In the struggles for jobs, we must not hesitate, even if it is simply propaganda to put forward the need to restrict private property to stop redundancies, and against privatizations to put forward all the perspectives of social and public appropriation.

4.3 These are some indications of the orientation for a policy of regroupment or assembling anti-capitalist forces. Of course this or that programmatic question is not a condition of coming together. We are not aiming for assembling forces on the basis of worked out revolutionary formulations. But the choice must be clear: defence of an anti-capitalist orientation, independence from bourgeois state institutions, a perspective which integrates the main lessons from Stalinism and social democracy. The centre of gravity of the anti-capitalist conferences also indicates a key point of our orientation: the European anti-capitalist conference has developed gradually from revolutionary or anti-capitalist organizations, that is to say from currents outside the traditional organizations. The current upheavals will not spare the traditional organizations but we will only have an impact on them if we act audaciously from outside, from strong poles.

4.4 At this stage the European anti-capitalist conference is a space for exchange of experiences and potential unity in action where currents like our own, the Italian PRC and the British SWP indicate possible convergences. With a strong reference point in the current situation: a common approach to the importance and necessity of intervening in the anti-globalization movement and of building a broad anti-war movement (need for mobilizations and direct actions against the war: demonstrations, symbolic occupations, strikes). Of course these questions are only starting points but they are essential for an overall approach.

The unity of revolutionaries on the simple basis of references to the socialist revolution is not politically useful. The unity of revolutionaries is only meaningful when it is turned towards the overall tasks of mobilization and political reorganization of the social movement.

This is what must guide us, on the basis of actual experience, in moving towards the proposal of anti-capitalist conferences in other continents or on an international level.

This is one of the major points of the world congress: to discuss and bring up to date the main lines of analysis, orientation and organization which can today bring together organizations that are revolutionary, radical and anti-capitalist.