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Asia Pacific

Birth of a new internationalism

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The convergence of resistance to capitalist globalisation is giving birth to a new internationalism of social movements. The second 'Asia Pacific International Solidarity Conference' (APISC), held on March 29-April 1st of this year in Sydney, shows that this question is also an issue for militant political parties.

The Democratic Socialist Party (DSP) of Australia initiated these regional meetings; the first was held in Sydney in 1998. They reflect a long experience of Asian solidarity work in Australia (particularly in relation to East Timor, Indonesia and the Philippines). Their originality lies in the participation of revolutionary or progressive political parties with diverse histories and ideological references.

The revolutionary movement in Asia and the Pacific remains (and will remain) very pluralist. A desire for political dialogue and practical cooperation has been affirmed, a break with the sectarian traditions which were particularly marked in the 1970s and 1980s. The rise and convergence of social resistance to capitalist globalisation now offers the parties concerned the chance to go beyond simple dialogue: they share new common international responsibilities, which should allow them to act together.

To some extent, the diversity of the Asian parties is hardly surprising: Asia is the most diversified continent in the world in terms of languages and cultures, colonial and contemporary history, economic development and social structure. However, there is more to it than that. The big international currents of the workers' and revolutionary movement have been actively present in this immense region, but none has durably ensured its pre-eminence (despite the temporary success of Maoism). Meanwhile, the new activist generations are increasingly less likely to identify with the references of the previous period.

The conference illustrated this state of affairs. Inter-party relations are not yet stabilized in some countries (Malaysia, Burma...) or zones (the south Pacific). However, a dozen parties jointly ensured the continuity of the regional process. Some are of Maoist origin, like the Communist Party Marxist-Leninist - Liberation of India or the organizations that have emerged from the crisis of the CP in the Philippines. Others refer to Trotskyism, like the Labour Party Pakistan (LPP) or the NSSP, the Sri Lankan section of the Fourth International; the Australian DSP itself was until 15 years ago the Australian section of the Fourth International. Others have a national history so specific that it would be vain to try and pin an international ideological label on them: this is particularly the case of the People's Democratic Party of Indonesia (PRD), the Socialist Party of East Timor, or Power of the Working Class in South Korea.

A renewal of generations is also palpable. The PRD in particular was built through the renewal of the struggles of youth during the years prior to the fall of the Suharto dictatorship. It is now three decades - a generation! - since the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) was drowned in a veritable bloodbath.

The diversity is not only international. From the first APISC in 1998, the Philippine delegation included several organizations, even if the Socialist Party of the Philippines (SPP) was the formation closest to the Australian DSP. At the second conference last April, this was also the case with the Pakistani representation. The presence of movements involved in the liberation struggles of the 'occupied periphery' of the Indonesia was also confirmed. This national or regional pluralism should logically be affirmed still more in the future, in a growing number of countries.

The main difference between the first and second conference relates to the nature of the debates which took place. If in 1998 they were about showing a will for dialogue, a sentiment of solidarity and a hope for cooperation, in 2002

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they concerned acting in common across Asia. The internationalisation of the process of the social forum has allowed this desire to be incarnated and the progress is qualitative.

The World Social Forum (WSF) obviously involves much broader forces than those represented in Sydney. The conference declared its support for this process and for the Appeal of Social Movements adopted in Porto Alegre in January 2002, for the organization of the WSF of 2004 in India and, in the framework of the Asian Social Forum, for a meeting in the Philippines in spring 2003.

From the beginning, Asian movements have participated in the WSF (like the Focus on the Global South network, the Freedom from Debt Coalition of the Philippines or Thailand's Assembly of the Poor). However, the reference point of 'Porto Alegre' remains abstract or unknown for a large majority of militants in this part of the world. The perspective of holding a WSF in India and the emergence of a regional process changes this and helps build a common identity, based on solidarity, in this continent where 'regional blocs' are unconscious of each other and the dangers of war are very real.

The convergence of resistance to capitalist globalisation offers a framework for a new internationalism of the social movements. The Sydney conference showed that political parties are also part of this process. Of course, all this remains fragile, in particular taking into account the political situation in many Asian countries (repressive crackdowns in the name of the 'anti-terrorist struggle'). Nonetheless, the experience is already far enough advanced to draw significant lessons, whatever happens in the future.