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Europe

A European left strategy

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The third Conference of the European anti-capitalist left was held in Brussels on December 12-13, 2001.

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It brought together parties, alliances and anti-capitalist movements from 10 countries, all committed in their respective countries to policies of regroupment and convergence. [1] This third Conference amounted to significant progress in comparison to those in Lisbon (March 2000) and Paris (December 2000), in terms of participation, quality of political debate and commitments undertaken.

Italy's Party of Communist Refoundation was present for the first time in the form of a delegation of two members of the national leadership. Without questioning the continuity of the international relations inherited from the former PCI (from which it originated), it has for several years practiced an orientation of "diversification". Other political formations from the Communist tradition were also present: the Dutch Socialist Party; [2] "La Gauche" from Luxembourg (made up of the CP itself, supporters of the Fourth International and a current which has left the CP) and the Turkish ÖDP (Party of Freedom and Solidarity, comprising currents originating from the CP, Guevarism, Maoism and Trotskyism).

Pluralist

Other formations present have a pluralist character which is more evenly balanced between the different currents: the Portuguese Left Bloc whose components are very integrated and include the UDP ("Marxist-Leninist", of Maoist and 'pro-Albanian' origin), which is the largest current, the PSR (Portuguese section of the Fourth International) and a small but very significant grouping originating from the CP; the Danish Red-Green Alliance (with Communist, left socialist and Fourth Internationalist components). Then there is the Socialist Alliance (England), recently set up and a dynamic factor to the left of the Labour Party. The integration of the different currents there is clearly weaker for the moment and the Trotskyist groups play a dominant role, above all the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) following the departure of the Socialist Party (SP). [3] Hence the independent presence of the SWP and SP at the conference. The SSP (Scottish Socialist Party) has an exceptional political dynamic in Scotland: the degree of integration of its different currents (various Trotskyist groups, left nationalists, left socialists, ecologists) is comparable to that of the Portuguese Left Bloc and the Danish RGA. Espacio Alternativo (from the Spanish state) is made up of different currents although a majority are members and ex-members of the United Left (Izquierda Unida, dominated by the Spanish CP), where supporters of the Fourth International play a significant role.

Involved from the beginning in these Conferences, the French LCR is in a paradoxical situation: while seeking the formation of a new broad anti-capitalist workers' party it does not for the moment have partners similar to those which exist in the other countries.

Lutte ouvrière which has a significant electoral impact through its main public representative, Arlette Laguiller, has a project of unification of Trotskyists alone and there are no significant and organized currents emerging from the CP, PS or Greens.

We are then talking about political formations which are very heterogeneous in origins, traditions, ideological residues, internal régime and methods of functioning and work - which does not prevent a political convergence

which appears to be growing and attracting new participants.

Why? Firstly, we are undoubtedly witnessing the emergence of a new "anti-capitalist" common identity that differs from social democracy and Stalinism, at a time when the revolution is not for the moment on the agenda. There is a common political sympathy combining a radical opposition to the European Union as currently structured, commitment to the everyday class struggle, a focus on the problems of society, the struggle against capitalist globalisation, democratic demands at all levels, and so on. Hence there is a clear consciousness of a new political opportunity to emerge from marginality and influence real social life. To do this it is necessary to forge unity between very diverse political forces, unity which goes well beyond simple punctual unitary action and electoral alliances. Advancing the process of convergence has to go hand in hand with political content and action.

Convergence

We could also mention here the role played in this process of convergence by the political generation which has ripened through the dual cycle of (semi-) revolutionary advance and reactionary downturn over the 1965-1995 period. Thus, this conference was capable of transcending two pitfalls which plague the leaders of traditional parties when they 'discuss' their respective political lines: diplomatic encounters rendered trivial through clichéd and wooden language, or the juxtaposition of anecdotal experiences. We also managed to avoid a well known feature of the 'revolutionary' small group tradition: ideological confrontation which sterilizes political debate and undermines common work.

The report by the Portuguese comrades on the new international situation was from this point of view useful - global, approaching the key questions which concern everybody, constructed on political judgments supported by arguments, in a tone which invited discussion. The report centred on two questions:

1. To what point is there a discontinuity with the previous political situation; and how far will the imperialist counter-offensive (combining war, the use of the recession to launch a new wave of neo-liberal attacks against the working class and the narrowing of democratic space in the name of the struggle against terrorism) go?
2. Will imperialism succeed in stifling the movement against capitalist globalisation, social struggles, the various forms of resistance, the renaissance of the social and political movement of the exploited and oppressed? What is the role of the movement against globalisation in the struggle against the war? How can we relaunch the global social movement and strengthen its links with the class struggle?

Two aspects polarized the debate. The first concerned the analysis of "fundamentalism" and its possible anti-imperialist dynamic; the second the anti-war movement and its political orientation. The SWP was the protagonist, claiming that the weakness of the anti-war movement in France (compared to Britain and Italy) was due to a large part to the line put forward by the LCR.

On the analysis of political Islam, there was real progress without complete agreement being reached (the SWP continuing to insist on the potentially anti-imperialist aspect of mobilizations sympathetic to Bin Laden and Al-Qaida). However, the SWP had difficulty in convincing the meeting that the cause of the (relative) weakness of the French movement could be attributed to the content of its platform. As the delegate from the PRC said, the most powerful movement in Europe - that of Italy - was based on a similar orientation to that of France, around two axes: a priority denunciation of the imperialist war and rejection without concession of the Taliban and Al-Qaida.

It should also be noted: the British Socialist Party (formerly Militant) refused to sign the declaration because of a disagreement on Europe. They argued that the current recession would lead to a rise of protectionism inside the EU setting the different member-countries against each other and potentially leading to an existential crisis (notably in relation to the euro). It was alone in defending this viewpoint.

Spectrum

The depth of political convergence achieved should not be underestimated given that the Conference succeeded in bringing together a spectrum going from the recomposed radical left to revolutionary organizations like the SWP and LCR via the PRC of Italy whose political prestige is soaring after Genoa, in Italy but also in the eyes of the other European CPs.

In today's world, initiatives from the parties of the radical left are not the be all and end all of things, for it is the 'new' movement against capitalist globalisation which is currently harnessing the vitality and political creativity of the activist layers in movement.

History has taught us that this is only a stage; the future will say how the dialectic inside the movement will go. Meanwhile, we can clearly assess the progress and limits of the Conferences. Each organization which participates has its own analysis and project and there is no need to have absolute agreement in order to work together. But the meetings need to continue, essentially for the following reasons:

– First, there is this elementary note: a political current exists which is clearly distinct from social-democracy and the Green parties, as well as (in a slightly different relationship) the Communist parties. This current has increasingly affirmed itself since the early 1990s around the themes of convergence, pluralism and anti-capitalism.

It results from the 'neo-liberalization' of social-democracy and the exhaustion of the revolutionary left, following the years of lead (1985-1995) which simultaneously eliminated the traditional perspective of class collaboration and that of socialist revolution. These radical formations are capable of having an impact and even entering the regional, national and European parliaments (if the electoral system of the country does not totally crush elective democracy).

Hence a simple political conclusion. Why not repeat what is done at the national level on the European level? All the more so in that the EU is increasingly imposing itself as a restrictive and burdensome institutional framework. Why, then, leave the 'established' parties of the left the monopoly of the 'international' European perspective?

The practical conclusion flows from this: we need to meet together so as to take common positions and act together, while of course being aware that each organization is involved in other unitary frameworks.

– There is a second point even more important than the first: the enormous gap between the brutality of the capitalist offensive and the working class' capacity for response. For the first time in 125 years there is no alternative vision of society, no programme of alternative action and no alternative organized movement on a mass scale. This vacuum is unprecedented. No radical or revolutionary organization has the means or credibility to fill it alone, still less by trying to impose itself against the rest of the militant left. Patient work to bring about a convergence of the live forces in the workers' and social movement, or, where they exist, in the currently existing left parties is an urgent necessity.

– Thirdly, the EU is undoubtedly being constructed. In the five years to come, we will be confronted with a powerful, articulated and above all supranational state apparatus. The whole ideological framework of the workers' movement

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will become largely obsolete and many things will have to be rethought, 'Europeanised': demands, tactics of struggle, modalities of action, activist networks, organizational links, the construction of teams of militants and leaders. The anti-capitalist left will not escape this process.

The second Conference (held in Paris) reached agreement easily enough on the critical analysis of the EU, the concrete denunciation of its policy and a general (socialist) alternative. Better: we were able to enumerate a catalogue of concrete demands - partial and anti-capitalist - that each can defend in their own country against their own state and employers.

But the essential was lacking: the struggle of the exploited and oppressed comes up increasingly against a Europeanised economic-industrial structure and Europeanised state structures; the centre of economic and political power is shifting. The survival of the workers' movement is linked to its Europeanisation. We need to advance patiently but systematically towards a European anti-capitalist programme and strategy.

There will be a chance to do this - while the 'Brussels' conference was dominated by the world situation, that of 'Madrid' will undoubtedly take place under the aegis of the capitalist Europe which has been set in motion.

[1] See IV 337 for the [press statement](#) released after the conference. The participants in the conference were: the Red Green Alliance (RGA, Denmark), the Scottish Socialist Party (SSP), the Socialist Alliance (SA, England), the Socialist Workers Party and the Socialist Party (Britain), the Socialist Party (SP, Netherlands), La Gauche ("The Left", Luxembourg), the Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire (LCR, Revolutionary Communist League, France), the Left Bloc (BdE, Portugal), Espacio Alternativo ("Left Space", Spain), Rifondazione Comunista ("Party of Communist Refoundation", Italy), Solidarité-S (Switzerland, Geneva), the Ā-DP ("Party of Solidarity and Liberty", Turkey), with Plataforma de Izquierda ("Left Platform", Spain) attending as observer.

[2] Of distant Maoist origin, the Dutch Socialist Party is a member of the European Unitary Left Ā- Nordic Green Left (GUE/NGL) in the European Parliament.

[3] The Socialist Party (SP) of England and Wales, formerly the Militant Tendency of the Labour Party, is a Trotskyist organization which was at the origin of the launch of the Socialist Alliance in England and which has since taken a more sectarian and self-proclamatory course, leaving the Alliance. It is part of an international organisation - the Committee for a Workers' International - recently weakened by the exclusion of its Pakistani section (Labour Party Pakistan, LPP) and the departure of militants from the International Socialist Movement (ISM), which was at the origin of the creation of the SSP.