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France

16th Congress of the LCR

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The LCR (French section of the Fourth International) held its 16th National Congress in January 2006. We reproduce the following report of the congress, accompanied by the principal motions adopted, from the 26th January issue of the LCR's weekly paper, Rouge.

Political perspectives

The profound significance and the consequences of the victory of May 29th (in the referendum on the European Constitution), the brutal continuation of the bosses' offensive, the difficulties in organising social mobilisation, the revolt of the suburbs, law and order legislation that attacks basic liberties, the debates about orientation on the left and in the social movement: these were so many contradictory elements, illustrating a complex situation, which were the backdrop to the 16th Congress of the LCR, which took place from January 19th-22nd in La Plaine-Saint-Denis, in the Paris Region.

[https://internationalviewpoint.org/IMG/jpg/LCR_congres.jpg]

The draft political theses presented by the different platforms sought to determine the overall orientation of the LCR until the next congress. The theses presented by Platform 1 won a relative majority of votes, both in the different local congresses and at the national congress (49.3 per cent for, 38.8 per cent against and 11.9 per cent of abstentions).

A large part of the debates dealt with the analysis of the points of support and the obstacles - as well as the initiatives that should be taken - in order to express on the political and electoral level the élan of May 29th.

The motion entitled "Let's respond to the hopes of May 29th" (see below) was adopted by the congress (48.9 per cent for, 44.2 per cent against and 6.8 per cent of abstentions). It outlines the approach of the LCR towards the different forces that took part in the campaign for the anti-liberal "No" to the European Constitution.

Taking into account the difficulty of the task, the congress also decided to begin, as of now, to collect signatures of elected representatives in order to ensure that the LCR can be present in the presidential election of April 2007.

To decide the organisation's position for the elections - presidential and legislative - that will take place next year, a new occasion for consulting the members of the organisation was programmed: next June, a national conference of the LCR will take those decisions.

There were other important decisions taken by the congress: on the attitude towards the "meeting of the Left" to be held on February 8th (adopted by 84 per cent of the delegates) and a motion on organising social resistance (86 per cent).

Lastly, the congress concluded with the election of the national leadership (DN), proportional to the votes obtained by the different platforms (Platform 1: 48.57 per cent; Platform 2: 12.14 per cent; Platform 3: 26.07 per cent; Platform 4: 8.93 per cent; Platform 5: 4.29 per cent). Like the leadership that was elected at the previous congress, in October 2003, the new DN respects parity between men and women.

The motions that were adopted

Here are, in their entirety, the principal motions adopted by the 16th Congress of the LCR.

Motion 1: “Resistance!”

Not a week goes by without the government or the employers announcing fresh attacks against workers. In 2003, Raffarin [Prime Minister at the time] said, “It is not the street that rules.” In 2004, the governing majority, disavowed in the regional and European elections, nevertheless persevered with its liberal policies, suffering another disavowal during the referendum on the European Constitutional Treaty.

In spite of the mobilisation on October 4th and those of the transport workers (SNCF, SNCF, RTM and public transport workers in several cities, the workers' movement today remains passive, without any real fightback. The government's policies are expressed in continuing mass unemployment, the increase in job precarity, and the drop in the cost of labour with the “new hiring” contract and the “first job” contract, and by increased attacks against the unemployed and casual workers through the new UNEDIC agreement [concerning unemployment pay].

At the same time, the government is giving free rein to the employers' plans for sackings and workplace closures in order to increase the capitalists' profit margins. Access to health care is becoming increasingly difficult with the implementation of the Douste-Blazy Plan, privatisations and the dismantling of public services are multiplying (EDF, Paris Airport, the Post Office Bank, SNCF, RTM, etc.) The right to be housed is flouted and the purchasing power of millions of workers is falling.

The revolts by the youth of poor neighbourhoods, last November, have once again illustrated the discriminations and the precarity of which these young people are victims, and in particular those who are from immigrant families.

The penal and anti-social reactions of the government, with the aggravation of its law and order and anti-immigrant policies, as illustrated by its intention to dismantle the education system (apprenticeships at 14), are only increasing inequality and preparing fresh explosions.

In spite of decades of struggle by feminists, the right of women to control their own bodies, to refuse violence and to put an end to discrimination in employment and wages, are constantly threatened.

The government continues to impose its policy of only nuclear energy, with in particular the putting into services of the EPR reactor and by worsening working conditions. It flouts food and ecological safety with the proliferation of GM crops.

It continues its imperialist policies, in particular in Africa and in Ivory Coast. Faced with this situation, the LCR is conducting a campaign around a social and democratic emergency plan, an anti-liberal and anti-capitalist plan which outlines the way to a break with liberalism and for a radical anti-capitalist transformation of society. We put forward this plan to be discussed with all the social and political forces of the workers' movement.

At the same time, the LCR is doing everything it can towards building a united front offensive, excluding no one on the left, against the Right and the bosses. It is necessary, without waiting for the elections, to build a front of struggle, a general mobilisation, in order to put a stop to the steamroller that is tearing to shreds the rights won by workers though decades of struggle by the workers' movement, and that is organising the satisfaction of the bosses' demands.

The congress of the LCR renews its call to all the forces of the workers' movement, unions, parties and associations:

it is now that we have to stop the Right, to stop liberalism and the employers: it is now that we must put a stop to policies of lay-offs, precarity and repression, by a general mobilisation of all workers and youth, to put an end to this illegitimate government and to its reactionary policies.

Motion 2

The policies of the government and the employers today make necessary a united front mobilisation of the entire social and political Left. All the parties, associations and unions, all those who refuse these new attacks must react together. Without conditions, without preliminaries, we have to unite against the policies of the government and the employers, to defend workers' demands and all democratic rights.

It is indispensable to organise a united front meeting which will discuss how to attain these objectives, in particular, against the "new hiring" contracts and the "first job contracts, against the attacks on the national education system, against privatisations, against the law glorifying French colonisation [which President Chirac has since annulled, bowing to widespread opposition].

But instead of organising a fightback on the scale of these attacks by the government and the bosses, the leadership of the Socialist Party is only thinking about 2007, about its many candidates and about rebuilding a new "plural Left" [the name given to the SP-dominated coalition government from 1997-2002] with the Greens, the Radicals and the Communist Party.

Far from having drawn the lessons of the Jospin experience and of the referendum on the European Constitution, the Socialist Party confirmed, at its recent congress, its adaptation to social-liberalism, and it wants to get the whole of the Left to follow this political line.

The meeting on February 8th, without an agenda, where some people want to talk about a political alternative and others a contract of government, can obviously not have our assent. We will not take part in this meeting, nor in meetings or coalitions around an overall governmental political project for a second edition of the plural Left. We are not in business to build an alternative or a government programme with the social-liberals.

What is needed is to converge towards a united front action and fightback against the Right and the bosses. The LCR confirms that it is ready to debate publicly with all parties of the Left in the framework of contradictory confrontations.

Motion 3: "Let's respond to the hopes of May 29th!"

For the LCR, the demands put forward for years in the strike movements and the campaign of May 29th clearly outline a break from liberal policies and social-liberal orientations, which were once again reaffirmed at the last congress of the Socialist Party.

For several months, we have worked towards unity in action and engaged in the debate and in meetings for such a perspective, which is particularly awaited by the militants who are involved in the campaign and the collectives of the "No" from the left.

The struggle to regroup forces on a basis that is consistently anti-liberal, and therefore anti-capitalist, is incompatible with the search for governmental or parliamentary agreements with social-liberalism. There really are "two Lefts", two irreconcilable orientations, one of submission to capitalist interests, the other of resistance.

The latter implies conducting policies that correspond to social needs, without being afraid to confront the bosses' interests. That would mean, for a government that had such an orientation, radical choices concerning the economy and the state institutions, choices which would imply the mobilisation of workers to impose their choices, because as we all know, the resistance of the reactionaries will be strong and determined.

Obviously, the time has come to make fundamental choices. Many people are looking towards the political, trade union and global justice forces that mobilised in a united way (in particular in the collectives that were launched on the initiative of the Fondation Copernic) for the anti-liberal and anti-capitalist battle during the campaign against the European Constitutional Treaty, and they would like us all to be united, including for the coming elections. This hope is legitimate and we share it.

In order to respond to it, we must build a unitary regroupment on the basis of an alternative to liberalism, of an anti-capitalist programme taking in social and democratic emergency measures, of a refusal of any governmental or parliamentary alliance with the social-liberals, of a perspective of radical transformation of society on the basis of popular mobilisations. It is not for us a question of persons, but of content.

Today certain obstacles prevent the conditions for such candidacies from being met. One obstacle is the choice of the Socialists of the "No" vote, who at the congress of the PS, took part in the synthesis [with the supporters of the "Yes" vote]. Another obstacle is the present policies of the leadership of the PCF, which in particular seek to bring together the Left of the "No" and the Left of the "Yes". Such choices are contrary to the expectations of many militants of these parties. We are not resigned to this situation.

The LCR will seek to overcome these obstacles, by actively conducting the debate on this question with the militants and currents that are present in the 29th May collectives and in the debates with the PCF. We will continue to work, everywhere, so that what is expressed is the profound dynamic of the "No" from the left and not the dangerous attempt to marry anti-liberalism and social-liberalism.

We will continue to work to create the conditions that will make it possible to stand unitary candidates in the 2007 elections, bringing together in a broad way the currents and the militants who took part in the victory of May 29th, in particular the members of the PCF and the LCR, and beyond them thousands of militants who are fighting, day after day, the evils of capitalism.

That would be beneficial for this alternative of which the youth and the workers of this country have so much need, and for which they have already been kept waiting so long. While continuing the unitary debate, to build an anti-capitalist alternative and give it a content, the LCR will from now on be taking the necessary measures to ensure its presence in the coming elections.

The PCF, the PS and the congress of the LCR

The congress of the LCR provoked many reactions on the left, even while it was going on. From the first day, the leadership of the PCF published a reply to a declaration on television by Olivier Besancenot, who held out "a fraternal hand to the Communist Party": "The PCF is always ready for a warm handshake, but what we especially need is to form with our people a gigantic human chain. We have to forge a new anti-liberal regroupment capable of defeating the Right. To do that, we have to conduct action today and conduct a large-scale debate, in public...We have drawn the lessons of the past. There is a need for something new on the left. Everyone has to work at it...".

At the end of the congress, on Sunday evening, there was a new statement by the leadership of the PCF: "Now is the time for the LCR to make a choice, either it stays on the side of the road, waiting for June, considering, in reality, that the Left is doomed to social-liberalism. Or else it commits itself fully to a popular and citizens' dynamic to build an anti-liberal project that really changes people's lives, the broadest possible regroupment of the Left to build a political majority. It is a pity that that it seems to have opted for resignation".

As for the PS, it declared, in the person of Francois Hollande [First Secretary] on the LCI radio station: "There is only one Left, the Left that wants to govern, and there is the far Left, which wants to wait for the revolution. Let it wait for the revolution, I respect that choice".

Lastly, let's note the reaction of Gerard Filoche, one of the leaders of the "No" from the left in the National Bureau of the PS: "The congress of the LCR debated between two false choices: refuse any unity of the Left and stand Besancenot [...] or wait and envisage a partial unity, necessarily pale, with an LCR-PCF candidate, excluding the PS, without besides being clear about standing down [for the PS] in the second round [...]"

There is only one choice that is politically, realistically possible: a single candidacy of the entire Left in the first round". If we want to defeat the Right in the second round, "better to get a head start and have the courage to engage the debate before the first round, to discuss a common programme and then designate a common candidate, even a Socialist". To be continued...