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Youth Camp

A big success

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From the 25th to 31st July, the 21st youth camp of the Fourth International took place in Ruesta in the province of Aragon in the Spanish State. The site was close to the Pyrenees, in beautiful surroundings close to a lake where you could go swimming during leisure time.

The Ruesta village used to be a peasant village, but when a dam was constructed in the 1950s they lost almost all their land. The village was abandoned until 1989 when the anarcho-syndicalist trade union CGT moved in and made a site for educational and recreational activities. Nevertheless it was not fully equipped for a camp the size of an FI Youth Camp. The forums of the camp took place in the former village church. It had only been used as a storehouse by the CGT, so it had to be cleared out and construction work done by the Spanish State comrades to make it adequate for the camp forums. The camp was also on the pilgrim path to Santiago de Compostela, and from time to time pilgrims or others following that trail would pass through. An unexpected encounter with another world!

Rebuilding the FI in the Spanish State

[<https://www.internationalviewpoint.org/IMG/jpg/36219a.jpg>]

More than 400 youth participated. It started out as the smallest camp ever with 350 participants. But numbers grew when over twenty Portuguese came on Wednesday directly from the first youth camp of the Left Block. Even more important, the number of participants from the Spanish State more than doubled from 50 odd at the beginning to over 120 at the end.

In 1989 the Fourth International organised the sixth annual youth camp in Catalonia in the Spanish State. That was before the unification with Maoist MC (Communist Movement). The unification produced an organization that did not exist for long and supporters of the Fourth International became dispersed. This was also reflected in the participation at the youth camps. From an average delegation size of 91 in the period 1984-1991 this dropped to an all-time low of 10 in 1997. Since then the number has been growing to 40 in 2003. This reflects the rebuilding and reorganization of the Fourth International. But the ability in itself of the comrades to take on the task of organising the camp is a real proof of this positive development, although it was based on a few people doing a lot of work.

The camp was a chance for Spanish State comrades who have never or not for many years seen an FI youth camp to be part of it. It was dedicated to Eduardo Langarita who was for many years active in mobilizing for the camps and building youth work in Aragon but died at a much too young age. Organizing such a politically successful camp in Aragon was achieving one of his goals.

Scotland and the Philippines represented for the first time

[<https://www.internationalviewpoint.org/IMG/jpg/36219b-2.jpg>]

The camp enthusiastically received the three-person delegation from the newest FI section, in the Philippines, and also the fraternal delegation from the Scottish Socialist Party, both attending for the first time. Some delegations such as the Swedish, Danish and British were noticeably bigger than in previous years - a good sign of the political work they do among young people. Others maintained the average size of the last few years without necessarily reaching their most optimistic targets.

For the Europe of the peoples

Against the Europe of capital, patriarchy and ... for the Europe of the peoples was the camp slogan. The latter part put the emphasis on the right to self-determination of the nations. In the Spanish State this is an important question. But it is not a simple one. During the camp there was room for an open discussion on the national question. There was a debate between the positions of Lenin and Luxemburg, Trogló, a leading member of the Basque organization Zutik, gave an educational on nations and the right to self-determination. And of course these debates are also quite relevant for the Scottish who did a workshop about the national question in Scotland.

Using the camp to organize and educate

In the context of European Social Forums - the globalization of struggles - the youth camp is no longer the sole place for youth in Europe to debate and organize and this might make it more difficult for people to go since they have to make a priority among several international or European events. But the most important thing is that the camp has in this process become a useful instrument to reflect, plan and get educated.

[<https://www.internationalviewpoint.org/IMG/jpg/36220.jpg>]

The camp has given more practical results in recent years. This year's most ambitious plans came from the permanent commissions working on students and casualized workers where a workshop for the ESF to promote a common campaign was decided, and the decision from the global justice movement commission to publish a common youth paper and organize a debate at the London ESF.

There were two educationals each day. The more theoretical issues were also related to the debates of the social forums. For instance there were debates on the ideas of Negri and Holloway.

Tradition and renewal in our politics

More than 30 workshops - it might be one of the most ambitious programmes ever with political activities from 10 in the morning till 11 at night - were organized during the week and were judged better prepared than in previous years. The growing number of workshops that were held in a participatory way was something the participants evaluated very positively. As an example, a workshop on sexuality began with massage to make everybody more relaxed and then people were asked to reflect on their own sexuality as a starting point for a more general discussion on the heterosexist myths that are imposed on us.

During 20 years of youth camps we have built traditions on the political experiences of the camps. Particularly on feminism and LGBT (Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transsexual) issues, the camp is an inspiration for our work. In the camp there is a women's space and a LGBT space as well as one night is dedicated to the women's party and another to the LGBT party. This year the responsibility for LGBT work was taken over by a new generation after it had been the same for some years.

The LGBT party is a party for the whole camp organised by the LGBT comrades while the women's party is organised by and for the women only as it has been since the first women's party more than 15 years ago. This is also one of the most hotly-debated issues of the year, and there were proposals that the format should change next year.

March to Artieda

While the camp is place for discussion and relaxation it is also a gathering of activists. In 2001 the camp took place in Italy after the Genoa demonstrations and a delegation from the camp participated in the Rome demonstration against police repression.

The nearby village of Artieda is struggling against a new dam that will destroy its livelihood - not only in the 1950s was the area affected by the construction of dams. To show active solidarity the camp made a march to Artieda. The participants liked the idea of taking concrete action during the camp and about half the camp participated. But the march turned out to be not such a good idea. It took place in the hottest hours of early afternoon and it turned out that the distance was 10 km instead of the 5 to 6 km that we had been told! So the deputy mayor of Artieda and Manolo Gari from Espacio Alternativo addressed a very tired and hot group of marchers. Apologizing for their mistake, the Spanish comrades swiftly organized for everybody to be brought back to the camp by bus.