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Fifteenth World Congress

# Ecology and socialism

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**This Congress was the first in the history of the Fourth International to adopt a resolution on ecology. This document, published in draft form in IV nearly two years ago, [1] was debated at length at the FI's International Executive Committee (IEC) and amended accordingly by the drafting committee designated by the IEC.**

An ecology commission of interested delegates met during the Congress to discuss certain proposed amendments. The most important was put forward by the comrades of the International Socialist Group (ISG, the British section); it was a document conceived by its author as an alternative to the draft resolution, but was presented by the ISG simply as proposed amendments. The central idea of the text was that the main, if not the only, question which should be dealt with by the resolution was climate change. This thesis was unacceptable for the editors of the draft, but they agreed to strengthen the part of the resolution dealing with the greenhouse effect and climate change, integrating some passages from the British text. Other remarks in this text were considered useful and could be integrated, in one form or another, in the resolution. This was the only written proposal put to the debate, with the exception of an interesting two page contribution from a Japanese comrade, 'Imperialism against Nature', which paid homage to the precursors of ecosocialism, William Morris and Vladimir Vernadsky, and recalled the criticisms made by Ernest Mandel of blind confidence in the omnipotence of technology, a characteristic trait of bourgeois ideology.

The debate in full session was opened by an introduction from comrade Michael, who insisted on the importance of the ecological question for the renewal of the revolutionary Marxist programme. The draft resolution is a first attempt to overcome our backwardness in this area, in the face of problems which are becoming more urgent every day, and which threaten the future of humanity. It leads us also to review certain traditional concepts of Marxist theory, like the 'development of the productive forces', in the light of the current ecological crisis.

Comrade Bernard, another co-editor of the draft presented to the Congress, intervened around the following axes:

the workers' movement has always demanded more control over production. The ecological struggles give this demand a supplementary depth by making of it a democratic demand of transparency. This demand renders also the question of social control more complex for it is no longer only about the intervention of the workers on their tool of production but of a democratic control which associates the whole population with sometimes contradictions to resolve.

Our current should identify itself more clearly, in particular in the imperialist countries, with a challenge to the 'productivist' aberrations linked to the capitalist system, and sketch the basic traits of an eco-socialist organization of society. The document proposed at this congress is a very important step in this work.

Most of those who intervened in the debate indicated their agreement with the general spirit of the document - a striking event in the thought of our movement, according to a Japanese comrade - while proposing precisions, corrections, or updates (the scandal of the 'Prestige' oil tanker, for example!).

The main exceptions came from the Dutch section. One comrade even proposed that the draft be abandoned in favour of a broader consultation with the sections so as to produce another document. Following a comradely exchange with the reporter, she modified her proposal in a constructive manner, suggesting that after the World Congress an international ecological seminar of our movement should be held, to continue elaborating on this theme. This suggestion was accepted by the reporter: an International Committee will define the dates and modalities of this seminar. Another Dutch comrade criticized the general tone of the document, above all for its programme of action -

in his view a not very realistic wish list: for example, the proposal of an immediate abandonment of nuclear power, which would deprive 70% of French and Belgian households of their source of energy. He also drew attention to the importance of military nuclear waste, much more dangerous than the civil kind. Finally, in his opinion, any technology presents intrinsic dangers and none should be considered as a panacea.

A French comrade active in the ecological movement replied to him, stressing the immense potentiality of solar energy, which is systematically neglected by capitalist techno science because if it is free and cannot be developed into a profitable commodity.

A theme for discussion tackled by a number of participants was the politics of the Green Parties. For some German, Indian or North American comrades, a more severe critique was needed of the reactionary errors of these political forces, while others thought on the contrary that it was necessary to keep bridges open to this current. It is expected that this debate will deepen, and one hopes that the current prudent approach will be maintained.

Some comrades think that the document avoids taking a position on the polemical questions, like ecological taxes or the necessity of a more austere way of life. According to the British comrades, alternative energies are not the solution, a draconian reduction in human energy consumption is needed (as much as 50%). In their text it is even suggested that collective habitat forms could be adopted instead of the current individual houses to economize on energy. These proposals were not accepted into their text by the authors of the draft.

Other proposals, corrections or amendments were accepted by the drafters:

Comrades from the Lebanon, Ecuador and Philippines proposed stressing the ecological damage wrought in the countries of the South by the capitalist multinationals who destroy their forests, export to the periphery pesticides banned in the countries of the centre, and export industrial or nuclear waste to the South. It is necessary to inform public opinion in the countries of the North about this and also to denounce the biopiracy of the capitalist enterprises - notably pharmaceutical ones - who appropriate and patent the traditional knowledge of indigenous peoples.

Comrades from Ecuador and India remarked that it was wrong to accuse the poor peasant countries or the indigenous peoples of destroying the forests by gathering wood to burn. It was the indigenous communities, in Amazonia or India, who protect the environment and act as guardians of the natural heritage of the whole of humanity, by fighting against the ravages of the multinationals.

A comrade from the Spanish state (Madrid) stressed the necessity of formulating an ecological programme adapted to our trade union intervention, around the following axes:

the relationship between workers' health and the environment: toxic production is dangerous for workers as well as for nature;

workers' control over production, to impose non-polluting techniques;

the ecological reconversion of industry, transport and agriculture as a job creation policy. It does not mean guaranteeing currently existing jobs in nuclear power stations or arms factories but guaranteeing everyone a job, whatever the necessary restructuring of production.

Comrades from Italy asked that demands around the question of water should be included; it has been the subject of mass social struggles in both the countries of the North (Spain) and the South (Bolivia) and is a key question. It is a

question of fighting both privatization and the pollution of water sources. It is a key question for the global justice movement, which has already found an initial form of expression in the World Forum for Water.

The Greek comrades proposed adding a section on the problems of the urban environment: the role of the privatization of public services in the degradation of urban space; the uncontrolled expansion of cities; the disappearance of green spaces and the destruction of woods and forests by roads and highways.

The Dutch and Basque comrades insisted that the document emphasize the question of destruction of the environment by war, and notably by the imperialist military expeditions against Iraq, Yugoslavia and so on. It is also necessary to take into consideration the monumental problem posed by military nuclear waste.

In his conclusion, the reporter replied to some criticisms and recalled that the draft resolution 'Ecology and Socialism' did not seek to close the debate but further encourage it - it was not the end but the beginning of a process.

The amended document was approved almost unanimously, with one vote against and one abstention.

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[1] ["Ecology and socialism"](#), IV327 January 2001