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Spain

For a leftwing revival of IU

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The sixth federal assembly of the IU was a setback for those who wished to confine its activity to settling the question of who was to succeed Julio Anguita. An essential debate on the causes of the IU's crisis and its political solution took place, both in the work of the commissions and in the plenary assembly. To a great extent, this was due to the "Alternative Document: for a leftwing revival of IU", which represented a contribution to the necessary process of tactical and strategic clarification.

More than 800 delegates participated in this congress, often selected in very debatable conditions, under pressure, or even, in the case of Madrid, in the absence of the most basic democratic transparency. The delegates supporting the "alternative document" defended a radical critique of the electoral pact with the PSOE, the necessity of a turn to the left and the urgency of practically supporting the right to self-determination to provide a solution to the national conflict, particularly in Euskadi.

The two main candidates to succeed Anguita as general co-ordinator, Francisco Frutos and Gaspar Llamazares, beyond differences of style and opportunism in speech and alliances, supported the right turn which lay at the heart of the document "For a 21st century left". Voting for this document, whatever the sensibilities and divergences displayed, meant that one could not clearly oppose this turn.

A significant vote for a turn to the left

Of the 551 delegates present, 152 voted for the "alternative document", or 27.6%. This document was defended particularly by Angeles Maestro and Susana Lopez, the most left wing sector of the PCE, and by Jesus Albarracin, Pedro Montes, Diosdado Toledano, Domingo and J. -M. Mendez, supporters of the Fourth International. The key elements of this document can be summed up as follows:

- a "13 point appeal" which defines the axis of a turn to the left in terms of political and social action and demands a more democratic functioning of the IU;
- the formulation of objectives radically opposed to the neo-liberal economic and social policy being implemented in the European Union and defended here by the PP in power, but also in essence by the PSOE;
- against wage deregulation (at the heart of the current negotiations between employers and trade unions), against the dismantling of public social services, for the defence of a public sector of the economy (against the threats of privatisation of rail transport supported by the right and the PSOE, with the connivance of the trade union leaderships of the UGT and CC.OO), for a municipal policy coherent with these priorities and which gives priority to the participation of citizens (with a merciless critique of practices contrary to the IU programme);
- defence of the positions of the previous federal assembly of the IU as regards the policy of alliances, for the unity in action of the left in struggle and social mobilisation against the neo-liberal offensive, for a programme of transformation; a unity which is not about agreements from above but which is built in an open and participatory fashion; relations with the trade unions which respect the autonomy of each and thus allow full liberty of criticism of the antisocial pacts or demobilisatory practices;

– denunciation of the internal functioning of the IU, often not very democratic as shown by the electoral agreement with the PSOE, where the rank and file but also the federal political council of the IU were short-circuited, the critique of the bureaucratic practices in several federations, notably in Madrid, and so on.

This document was enriched during the congress by integrating the contributions of the Andalusian delegation of the CUT on globalisation and more broadly on the national question and the practical defence of the right of self-determination.

The significant points of the congress

Shortly after the assembly opened, the partisans of Gaspar Llamazares proposed a modification of the mode of selection of the future co-ordinator general, so that it was no longer done by the federal council but by all the delegates, with clearly presidentialist arguments which claimed to "give a greater legitimacy to the future co-ordinator"... This proposal was defeated, receiving only 295 votes against 379 and 13 abstentions. A crushing blow to the camp of Llamazares which had boasted to the press that it comprised 55% of delegates.

From there on the pressures on the delegates increased, since a small number of them could turn around the relation of forces. The credentials commission only finally questioned the legitimacy of three or four delegates. The partisans of the "alternative document" who supported the candidature of Angeles Maestro were accused of various undisclosed intentions. The ballot itself did not take place in the best conditions: the ballot forms of the different candidates, for example, were not of the same format.

The results were as follows: of the 75 members of the federal political council, 32 supported the candidature of Llamazares, 30 that of Frutos and 13 that of Maestro. The minorities had then the real possibility, in full or in part, of arbitrating between the two leading candidates. The meeting of the federal political council ended speculation. The partisans of the "left turn" showed their seriousness and cohesion. Angeles Maestro received his 13 votes and it was thus by maximising his own votes that Gaspar Llamazares was elected general co-ordinator.

And now?

Some questions remain as to the future of the IU and the outcome of the political and leadership crisis it is experiencing. The political orientation approved by the majority will strengthen this crisis.

The drift of the new PSOE leadership towards neo-liberal centrist positions, the declarations of its new secretary general Zapatero who qualifies as "leftwing" the lowering of taxes, who presents the PSOE as liberal and "libertarian", who defends the extension of privatisations, who is at one with the PP in Euskadi, all weighs on the IU's policy of alliances. Programmatic rapprochement is only conceivable if the IU takes new liberties with its own programme (as it has already done on the Basque question), but with the risk of reinforcing its left opposition and aggravating internal conflicts.

The will to re-establish "relations" with the trade union federations, at a time when the leaderships of the UGT and CC.OO are accentuating their policy of pacts and demobilisation and are daily abandoning still more the language of the class struggle (the new secretary general, Fidalgo, has just praised wage moderation), will facilitate neither social remobilization nor trade union recomposition on more combative left bases.

All this generates tensions inside the IU and does not augur a more democratic functioning, nor a new more open and participative style.

The diversity of support for the two majority candidatures and the agreement concluded for governing the IU are heavy with instability. In the camp of Llamazares one finds both the right, the barons allied to the PSOE in the government of the Balearic Islands, the partisans of Espacio Alternativo and Anguita himself, in other words the risks of fissure are legion.

This underlines the importance that the "alternative document" and the elected representatives of its platform can have. This position brings together diverse sectors of the left of the PCE, the CUT of Andalusia, militants of the Fourth International in Quadernos Internacionales, other Trotskyist groups like the PRT, left independents... all committed to fighting to turn the IU to the left and take active initiatives that serve this objective.

18 November 2000

Diosdado Toledano and Pedro Montes were elected to the federal political council on the positions of the "Alternative Document". They are also members of the Fourth International.