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European Social Forum

Looking for a second wind

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Even though the level of participation in the European Social Forum in Malmö (Sweden) was limited, this framework remains irreplaceable in order to permit a sharing of experiences and to support the organization of mobilizations on a European scale.



Translation headsets used at European Social Forum Image: Wikimedia

The Fifth European Social forum (ESF) was less filled with enthusiasm than the preceding ones, in particular because the level of participation was lower (a little more than 10,000 entries) and because of the sometimes chaotic material conditions in which it took place. That is to be explained mainly by the, at the very least, limited engagement of the Swedish trade-union organizations. They are not very interested in Europe and in the mobilizations that need to be to be organized on this scale faced with the policies of the European Union (EU), thinking, wrongly, that they have more to gain more by limiting their action only to a national framework in order to preserve social gains.

But there are other reasons that explain a certain running out of steam of the dynamics of the social forums. By confining political organizations to a subordinate role, the whole question of the global political alternative that must be counter-posed to neo-liberalism is evaded. The simple sum of the social movements will not make it possible to defeat liberal policies. Without a debate on strategy, the slogan "Another Europe is possible" is just a hollow formula.

Having said that, the ESF remains an irreplaceable framework for exchanging experiences, for building and consolidating networks on questions like immigration, precarious work, the climate, or war. The demonstration which took place in the streets of Malmö brought together some 15,000 participants, which is a lot for Malmö and for Sweden. Better still, the general meeting of the social movements, which closed the ESF, adopted a declaration fixing four great objectives, a kind of common agenda for global justice activists.

The priority is to conduct a prolonged campaign, entitled "2009: to change Europe", on social questions and those relating to work, opposed to the reactionary policies of the EU, with the objective of a European initiative, in Brussels, in March 2009, on the occasion of the summit of European heads of state. The three other objectives are a European demonstration in Strasbourg on April 4, on the occasion of the ceremonies celebrating the 60th anniversary of the creation of NATO; a counter-summit and a demonstration during the next meeting of the G8, in Sardinia; and, lastly, on the climate crisis, an initiative in Potsdam on December 6, as a prelude to the big international gathering envisaged in Copenhagen in December 2009, during the world conference on the climate that is being organized by the United Nations. These four campaigns, as well as the preparation of the next European Social Forum, which will take place in Istanbul, are so many elements which can make it possible for the global justice movement to find a second wind.