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**France**

# **May 68 and the Paris conference of the European anti-capitalist left**

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**From May 31 –June 1, 2008 an important political initiative called by France’s Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire (LCR) to mark the 40th anniversary of May 1968 took place in Paris: an international meeting and a conference of political formations of the European anti-capitalist left.**

[<https://www.internationalviewpoint.org/IMG/jpg/AK43.jpg>]

Throughout May initiatives from the anti-capitalist left to mark the anniversary have taken place across Europe. The common objective has been to reclaim the inheritance of May 68 from the attacks of the reactionary right and attempts at banalisation of the events of that year, and to register the memory of May in the struggles of the present. The campaign “May 1968 – May 2008. We continue the combat” launched by Espacio Alternativo with events in different cities of the Spanish State was framed by this dynamic. Of all the initiatives called on a European scale, the LCR’s meeting stands out in its importance.

More than 2,000 people went to the Mutualité to hear a broad panel of people representing different militant generations, that of 1968 and that forged in recent combats, and from different countries: Alain Krivine and Daniel Bensaïd, both founders of the LCR and outstanding leaders in May 68, Boguslaw Zietek of the Polish Party of Labour (PPT), Myriam Martin, a member of the LCR leadership, Flavia D’ Angeli of Sinistra Critica (Italy), Francisco Louça, delegated from the Portuguese Bloco de Esquerda, a young participant in the student struggles of recent weeks in France and Olivier Besancenot, spokesperson of the LCR and its candidate in the last two presidential elections.

The objective of the meeting, as Alain Krivine indicated, was not “to have a meeting of old combatants” but of “present and future combatants”, for “exchanging generational experiences of international struggles” and discussing the possibility of another May 68 “in new conditions, in a new historical period and with new correlations of force”.

Daniel Bensaïd denounced the discourse of the right, through the likes of Sarkozy, about “eliminating” May 68 (with little success apparently since more than ¾ of the French population indicate in the surveys that they have a positive opinion of the events), and also that which tries “to sweeten” the events, reducing it only to its cultural dimension, in the style of Daniel Cohn-Bendit. For the latter, May 68 has triumphed in the cultural area and he now wants simply to forget it, as he says in the title of his book, “Forget 68”. “To reread 68 as a movement of cultural modernization has a very clear function: to depoliticize it” indicated Bensaïd.

1968 was a great social revolt where, although perhaps “not all was possible, something else was of course possible. It was possible to overthrow De Gaulle and the regime of the Fifth Republic, by the force of the general strike”. Today the lessons of 68 it can be useful for the present struggle. 1968 left “a memory and a culture of struggle” that explains the difficulties encountered in France in the application of neoliberal counter-reforms, from 1995 to the present. “After the difficult period of the 1980s, when many withdrew, we have gained the right to recommence”, said Bensaïd.

Boguslaw Zietek of the Polish Party of Labour (PPT) spoke about the situation in Poland and the emergence of some excellent recent union struggles, such as the strike at Tesco supermarkets and of the necessity to coordinate union struggles on the European scale.

Myriam Martin, from the LCR leadership, denounced the neoliberal and authoritarian policy of Sarkozy indicating the necessity “to fight against the repressive state that is developing in this country”, and to support the struggles underway, like those of undocumented immigrants, who were strongly represented in the room. “The combat is far

from over”.

Flavia D' Angeli spoke about Berlusconi's policy and the failure of the Italian left in the last general elections. “When the left in the government does not respond to any of the popular expectations, it is the right who win” and “when the anti-capitalist left [a reference to Rifondazione] governs the capitalist system, is not the left that wins, but the system. It is necessary, therefore, to advance towards the “construction of a new anti-capitalist left, the left of the 21st century”.

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

Flavia d'Angeli from Sinistra Critica in Italy

Francisco Louça, delegated by the Bloco de Esquerda in Portugal, began his intervention denouncing the “intensity of the hatred of the right against the 68”, frightened before the ghost of its repetition. Louça also spoke about the policy of the Bloco in Portugal and the importance for the European left of the LCR's proposal for the construction of a New Anti-capitalist Party (NPA) in France.

After Louça, a young participant in the French student struggles explained their dynamic and the necessity “to organize to fight against the government”.

Finally, Olivier Besancenot, spokesperson of the LCR, indicated that May 68 had been a central event in the history of the current represented by the LCR, which had not only been in synch with the rising struggles and the aspirations for change of the younger generation, but has remained faithful to this commitment. “Many abandoned the struggle. We didn't”.

“We do not put 68 on a pedestal”, but rather see how its legacy serves us in today's combat. Besancenot explained the NPA project of constructing a new activist-based political instrument, open to the popular sectors, and on the basis of strategic independence with respect to the Socialist Party and to the institutions. Anti-capitalism and internationalism will be two fundamental constituent elements of the new project. “Internationalism is not only an inheritance. It is our trademark. Our daily practice” indicated Besancenot.

For that reason, “to advance in the construction of a European anti-capitalist party” is one of the objectives that the new French anti-capitalist party is going to pursue from its constitution.

*Go to end of page for meeting videos*

### **The meeting of the European anti-capitalist left**

A hundred representatives of thirty organizations from sixteen European countries, among them Espacio Alternativo, participated in the international conference held in the theatre of Belle Étoile in Saint Denis, from May 31-June 1. The objective was to relaunch the dialogue between the forces of the European anti-capitalist left, to discuss jointly and to see what perspective of collaboration could be drawn up.

The meeting began with a general debate on the political situation in Europe and the strategic perspective of the anti-capitalist left, from an introductory report by François Sabado of the LCR. The report noted the situation of capitalist crisis that dominates the present world-wide conjuncture, the increase of social contradictions and the ecological crisis, the ascent in many European countries of a reactionary combative right, and the crisis of the traditional left, marked by the social-liberal mutation of social democracy and the subordination of a good part of the

formation located to its left (like IU in the Spanish state or Rifondazione in Italy).

He raised the necessity of the construction of an anti-capitalist left, independent of social democracy and the institutional logic and rooted in the social resistance, and to advance in the reconstruction of a socialist perspective for the 21st century.

The debate showed the existence of important points of agreement among the forces present on the general characteristics of the international political situation and the conviction that is necessary to advance towards a greater collaboration of the anti-capitalist left on the continental scale.

Along with the general debate, three specific discussions took place on: the permanent global war and the military policy of the EU; climate change and the strategies of the anti-capitalist left; and the policy of immigration in the UE in a context marked by the ascent of racism and xenophobia. The debates in these areas showed the existence of relatively common approaches on the part of those present, all involved in the campaigns and mobilization around these subjects.

In the conference some concrete agreements were made and the forces present decided to continue looking for forms of joint collaboration in the next big European mobilizations, like the next European Social Forum in Malmö (in September of this year) or the mobilizations that will take place in Strasbourg and Kiel in spring 2009, around the sixtieth anniversary of NATO. A new meeting was agreed for 2009 to continue the dynamic initiated in Saint Denis.

The success of the conference and the large numbers attending show, beyond the interest in the French political situation and the LCR's project for the creation of a new anti-capitalist party is attracting, the understanding on the part of a broad number of organizations of the European anti-capitalist left of the necessity to advance towards a greater international collaboration.

The advance of European integration necessitates intensified collaboration between the formations of the European anti-capitalist left. Nevertheless, until now advances in this area have been quite modest. National particularities, the strategic plurality of existing traditions in the anti-capitalist field, differences of organization model, and so on have meant that the crystallization of a European space of the anti-capitalist left has not yet been possible, beyond some very limited advances.

The Conference at Saint Denis could serve towards a relaunch of coordination of European radical formations. Objectives should be concrete and realistic, without trying to go too far too quickly or leaping stages, little by little affirming an anti-capitalist pole to the left of the left which has become subordinate to social-liberalism. The meeting helped put us to all on the right path, although the way is going to be long.

[Watch the speech of Alain Krivine here](#)

[Watch the speech of Daniel Bensaid here](#)

[Watch the speech of Flavia d'Angeli here](#)