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Fifteenth World Congress

Opening speech of the Congress

- IV Online magazine - 2003 - IV349 - May 2003 -

Publication date: Friday 9 May 2003

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"The interval between this 15th World Congress and the preceding one is unusual in relation to our tradition. Certainly, this time gap stems from our organizational weaknesses. However, particularly in recent years, it is due to a very large extent to the revival of our national organizations and their increasingly broad involvement in the new struggles and the new social movements which has made it very difficult to fix a timetable which everyone can respect. Even today, some organizations have been unable to send delegations corresponding to their real strength.

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The congress of 1995 took place, it is true, six months after the insurrectional movement in Chiapas. But the workers' and anti-imperialist movement remained, for the most part, in a trough. It should be remembered, for example, that we met before the great strikes of November-December 1995 in France, which simultaneously confirmed the persistent combative potential of significant layers of the proletariat and represented an anticipation of the massive struggles and mobilizations which would subsequently take place both in Europe and in other continents.

It is not idle to dwell for an instant on the breadth of the setbacks and defeats of the 1980s and 1990s, which had an extremely heavy impact on the relationship of forces at the world level and still more, perhaps, on the retrograde dynamic of consciousness. The workers' and popular movement had suffered more dramatic defeats in its history, from 1922 in Italy, 1923 in Germany and the crushing of the revolution in the Spanish state to the massacres of 1965 in Indonesia and 1973 in Chile. But these were defeats in major confrontations with the dominant classes and, almost immediately after these defeats, resistance began clandestinely and the question of reconstruction was posed.

At the beginning of the 1990s, the social-democratic parties, in the countries where they had long historic roots, became henceforth the direct instruments of the restorationist offensive of neoliberalism and engaged themselves at the first level in imperialist wars, in this succession which could culminate in a new bloody enterprise in the coming weeks. In temporary convergence, the Soviet Union and the other bureaucratized societies of eastern Europe collapsed, unleashing a process of capitalist restoration. All this was perceived by hundreds of millions of militants not only as a major defeat, a negative evolution of the relation of forces on the international scale, but also - and very often above all - as a loss of identity, the loss of one's own *raison d'être*.

The Fourth International, founded in opposition to Stalinism and to continue the battle of Communists against social democracy, was able to grasp the contradictory aspects of these processes. But we could not be sheltered from the ravages which traversed the workers' movement as a whole. That explains a series of blows that we suffered throughout the 1990s.

As we will see in our debates, the symbolic date of Seattle marked the opening of a new stage, whose distinguishing traits were seen very much more clearly in the three meetings at Porto Alegre and the gigantic demonstration in Florence. It is in this context that our movement has experienced a new expansion through participating actively in the new struggles and in the new movements and playing a role in them that has justly been appreciated by all those with whom we have collaborated in the most open pluralist spirit.

In principle, we have never suffered from the fatal malady of the workers' movement that is parliamentary cretinism, even if we have suffered some drifting at different times, from Sri Lanka to countries on other continents. Thus we are not afraid to stress, as a reflection of our growing influence, the fact that in the last decade we have had parliamentary representatives elected in a series of countries, from Brazil to the Philippines, Denmark to Portugal and to the European Parliament. In Brazil, a comrade like Miguel Rossetto, whose qualities and militant spirit are known,

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is today a member of the government emerging from the unprecedented popular success represented by the election of Lula. Miguel has assumed a crucial responsibility with the task of accomplishing a radical agrarian reform, capable of generating a more general dynamic of rupture with the system. We will follow and support his fight, supported by all the most advanced sectors of the PT and the MST and, stifling an underlying anguish for the extreme difficulty of the enterprise, we express to him in this congress our warmest solidarity.

The first battles of the International Left Opposition contributed the young militants, men and women, educated politically in the crucible of the years of the October revolution and the foundation of the Third International. A second political generation emerged and made a major contribution to the construction of our movement at the end of the Second World War. A third, which is present in this room, is the generation of 1968 and the struggles of the following years. Then, there has been a sort of vacuum, for too long perhaps. But today - this is the clearest sign of the change which is underway - a fourth generation is active and is also represented in this room, although to an extent that does not reflect sufficiently its role in the struggles of numerous countries. This generation, which has not suffered the erosion of major setbacks and defeats, has emerged in a dramatically explosive context. It is increasingly conscious of the stakes before us: to avoid falling into barbarism, or witnessing the destruction of the planet. Its motivation is, then, existential in the strictest sense of the term. To borrow a poignant metaphor used by a revolutionary intellectual from the United States, speaking of intellectuals of other times, these youths are and can see themselves as "exiles from a future time". It is why they struggle to escape this exile, to make possible a new world.

I have participated in 14 of the 15 congresses of the Fourth International, missing the first only for reasons of age. If someone asked me if I had an idea of what our next congress would be like, I would be tempted to sketch two hypotheses: If this congress takes place in the context of a prolongation of the current dynamic, we would in any case know a transformation still greater than what we know now. But, second hypothesis, if the current dynamic deepens, generalizes and culminates in still deeper revolutionary upheavals than today, we could hope that somewhere in the world, at a date that could prove more decisive than March 1919 (foundation of the Third International) and September 1938 (foundation of the Fourth International) a meeting will be held which gathers all the most worthwhile revolutionary forces, independently of their origins and their paths, to give birth to a qualitatively new international workers' movement, capable of fulfilling the urgent and dramatic tasks which are already today and will be still more in the future on the agenda of the human race!"