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**ESF**

# **A new step forward**

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**One year after its first gathering in Florence, the second European Social Forum will be held November 13-15 in Paris and in three towns of what was once the 'red belt': Saint-Denis, Bobigny and Ivry.**

This event can allow the social movement and the movement for global justice to take a new step ahead in opposing the construction of a neoliberal Europe, through campaigns and mobilizations for a Europe of social rights which will render credible the prospect of another Europe, a social and democratic Europe of the workers and the peoples.

## Memories of Florence

Remember, less than a year ago, in Florence, the holding of the first European Social Forum (FSE).

Two and a half days of intense debate involving tens of thousands of activists, mostly very young, global justice activists, trades unionists, feminists, ecologists, of various political hues but all deeply convinced that capitalist globalization was disastrous for humanity and that another world is possible. And on Saturday afternoon, a million demonstrators filled the streets of Florence against the imperial war that the United States was preparing to launch against Iraq.

From the meeting of the social movements an appeal against the war emerged which led to demonstrations across Europe on February 15. Relayed to Porto Alegre, through the framework of the World Social Forum, this appeal led to the greatest anti-war demonstration ever organized on a planetary scale. Berlusconi and his government, who had predicted for weeks that the global justice movement was going to ransack one of the cradles of the Italian Renaissance, were rebuffed. The demonstration made it plain that the extreme violence and trouble which had marked the demonstrations against the G8 in Genoa a year earlier were due to the forces of order and not the demonstrators.

The other big losers were the social-liberal currents. The leaders of the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) and the social democratic parties saw their orientation very largely rejected in the debates. Their attempt at marginalizing the radical currents, to oppose the social movement to radical left-wing political organizations, failed lamentably. What appeared at this ESF were two lefts, one social-liberal and the other rejecting the imperatives of the market economy and the search to maximize profit. This cleavage ran through both the political organizations and the social movement.

## Paris takes over

The ESF in Paris will have the ambition of amplifying this dynamic. And it is possible. Since Florence, there have been the immense demonstrations against the war in Iraq, the mobilizations and strikes, sometimes general, in several countries against austerity policies and attacks on social rights, particularly pensions, social security and public services. In France, national education was paralyzed by a strike lasting several weeks.

As for the global justice movement, it showed its vitality during the anti-G8 demonstrations in Annemasse and

Geneva and at the immense gathering of more than 200,000 people in Larzac against the World Trade Organization (WTO).

Add to that the failure to reach agreement at the WTO meeting in Cancun in September, and all the ingredients are there to make the second ESF a resounding event. Like that of Florence, this ESF will boost opposition to the legitimacy of capitalism as well as to those who control the European Union and the various European states.

Five days of debate and mobilization

The 60 lectures and the 250 seminars at the ESF cover every aspect of neoliberal politics. There will be five broad axes:

1. against the war, for a Europe of peace and justice, of solidarity, open to the world;
2. against neoliberalism, against patriarchy, for a Europe of social and democratic rights;
3. against the logic of profit, for a society of social justice, ecologically sustainable and for sovereignty in food;
4. against the process of commodification, for a democratic Europe of information, culture and education;
5. against racism, xenophobia and exclusion, for equality of rights, dialogue of cultures, for a Europe welcoming to immigrants, refugees and asylum seekers.

These five general axes will be supplemented by strategic questions like the contribution of feminism to the social movement, the fight against the far right or the range and dynamics of the social forums in the years to come, an opening on the world so as to avoid a Eurocentric vision of the response to capitalist globalization, a confrontation between political parties and social movements and finally a series of questions which are generally underestimated, like disability rights, the rights of children, the urban and national questions or Islam.

This kaleidoscope makes it possible to give a coherence to various resistances and mobilizations against the consequences of capitalist globalization, to show that these various and plural resistances will be able to win only if they are capable of unifying around a coherent alternative project to capitalism.

On Wednesday, the European Assembly for Women's Rights will be held - although not formally part of the ESF it fits in perfectly with its aims. The goal of this initiative is to highlight questions related to the oppression of women, denounce the neoliberal policies which accentuate this oppression and develop the struggles of women and feminist associations and to ensure that these issues are then taken up by the ESF as a whole. The street demonstration on Saturday, which promises to be huge, is based around the following demands: defence of the public services, social security and pensions, rejection of all discrimination, prohibition of layoffs, opposition to war, the commodification of all human activity and the destruction of planet.

Finally, the general assembly of social movements will cap off these five days of mobilization. 2004 will be a key year, with the installation of the new European Constitution, enlargement of the European Union and a deepened neoliberal offensive against social rights and the public services. It would be very significant and useful if this meeting issues a call for the defence of social rights which can form a point of support for the mobilizations to come on a European scale.

With regard to the continuations of the mobilization against the war, two important events are coming up which this assembly should take on board. First, between Christmas and New Year, the organization 'Against war and all occupations, for the defence of the rights of the Palestinian people', is organizing a caravan which could cross Palestine, Iraq and Kurdistan. Also, there is the appeal launched by 200 US organizations for a demonstration on March 15, 2004 to mark the beginning of the invasion of Iraq and call for an end to occupation. - that is our goal.

# An event not to be missed

To debate alternative responses to capitalist globalization in Europe, to establish and strengthen European networks in all fields, to support continent-wide mobilizations against the neoliberal offensive whose objective is to sweep away all the social rights conquered over the past half-century

For decades, internationalism has been ridiculed and non-existent. The world and continental social forums provide an irreplaceable framework for overcoming this situation. They can allow the labour movement, with the social movements, to create the kind of convergences necessary to give a true credibility to this aspiration for another world. We want a world without exploitation, where all forms of oppression will be banished, a world where wealth will be measured in free time, a world which will respect ecological equilibria. The second European social forum can be a step in this direction. It is an event not to be missed.