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Fourth International

RSB Germany: Towards a broad International at any price?

- Fourth International resolutions - World Congresses - 16th World Congress - 2010 - 16th World Congress Discussion - 2010 -

Publication date: Monday 14 December 2009

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As we have explained during different International committee meetings, we have at least six major differences with this text:

1. We think there cannot be a single tactics for building a revolutionary organisation. Yet the text in discussion suggests that there can be a universal building line, although situations in countries may be very different and although most of the sections cannot apply the tactic of regroupment with other forces and still less apply the line of building a broad organisation. Thus “broad parties” cannot be the universal goal in building our organisations.
2. We insist on emphasising that in our opinion there is no reason to play down the difference between reformism and revolutionary Marxism. Moreover: with the current, very grave crisis of capitalism the term “anticapitalist” has come into fashion in the vocabulary of very diverse forces. However, this term is losing its concrete relevance and is no longer sufficient as a guideposts. The tasks before us have not become smaller and there is no objective common ground between reformism and revolutionary communism; on the contrary. With the loss of leeway for reformism, almost all reformist parties are becoming further and further integrated into the capitalist system. As a result, on this level our tasks have become more difficult and complicated, if we do not want to merely cling to the skirts of reformism.
3. The draft resolution fosters the illusion that in the near future we will be able to create a new international or at least a new international framework (“dans la perspective d’un nouveau regroupement international / in the perspective of a new international grouping”). To achieve this goal and facilitate this task, the text proposes to build the 4th International based on “our vision of the future”. But nowhere is this described or is what it involves laid out. Yet what are the programmatic bases we want to struggle for? Without this absolutely necessary clarification, any policy tending to force this course of regroupment and broadening can be a slippery slope towards an adventure with unforeseeable consequences. What do we mean by “21st-century socialism”? This calls for an intense debate within the International in order to learn from our sections’ different experiences and theoretical and programmatic contributions.
4. What is a “pluralistic left”? If it is an inherent value, it calls for more concrete characterisation, because in the absolute, a pluralistic organisation can be anything whatsoever. Just note: the fusion of two reformist currents, claiming to be “open” does not make this into a broad party as some of the authors of the draft resolution are imagining.
5. In the near future, there is no question of us being in a position to rebuild the international workers’ movement. We can make some slight contribution, but setting this reconstruction as a task can lead us to lose sight of what is actually possible, thereby “forgetting” the crucial lessons of the history of the workers’ movement (and our own history).
6. Finally, we need a thorough debate on the evolution of reformist parties (in our opinion, some are former reformists), in particular social-democratic parties. Indeed, it is totally unsuitable to apply a general characterization to all of these parties, as the differences are too major according to the stage of concrete evolution of their shift to the right and their integration to the capitalist order. A collective debate on the criteria to be retained would be very useful as overly rough appreciations (or those that are only orthodox at first glance) can lead us to make huge errors, or paralyse us politically (by holding us prisoner to ritualistic formulas). We have to ask the sections concerned to conduct a recent analysis of the state and evolution of social-democratic and ex-Stalinist parties in their countries. Ascribing a supposedly unchanging class nature, or a function in the current course of the class struggle that is also

unchanging is in no way Marxist and can lead us to fail to take real changes into account and to pointlessly chase after reality out of ignorance. Just one example: if the adjective "reformist" is so common in analyses where it is used with no further specification, then it becomes evident that any new social-democratic formation that develops to the left of an existing social-democratic party is automatically "left reformist". The problem with this is that if we proceed thusly, the descriptors (reformist and left reformist) lose any content. In certain cases, this can lead to profound errors in estimating concrete political evolutions.

This said, we also want to submit some of the explanatory comments we had already made to the International Committee to the Congress preparatory discussion and to the delegates:

Despite wishful thinking and repeated calls we must observe that the left is not joining together in "broad parties". The question "what party to we want to build", "what should be the nature of a broad party, if the participation of revolutionary Marxists is to be meaningful or "what processes of unification should we participate in" is truly the decisive question. But this very question is often forgotten.

As long as we do not debate these key questions collectively we won't make progress. We don't entirely share Tariq Ali's observation that "the Left and social movements in Europe (Italy is the most recent example) are in an advanced state of decomposition" but we cannot share in the euphoria, in particular about EACL (European Anticapitalist Left) harboured by some comrades. The EACL project is the most obvious expression of a vague perspective and divergent concepts.

In our opinion the International has the best analyses and a programme that has best passed the test of history, but it is really disoriented in terms of building the revolutionary organisation.

In order to avoid any misunderstanding we insist on making the following comments:

– No doubt must arise about our unshakeable orientation favouring an offensive common action policy (united front). The heart of this orientation is and must remain our work in the extraparliamentary opposition and the trade union left.

– We are ardent partisans of candidacies in elections. There is no activity that has contributed as much to the dissemination/propagation of our ideas as Olivier's candidacy.

– The current debate must concentrate on the question: how can we take part in truly anticapitalist forces, coalitions or fronts? And secondly: what do we want to achieve in these? Because the process of differentiation between forces that merely fight neoliberalism and those that view themselves as anticapitalist or more precisely "revolutionary" is nowadays the most important differentiation in a good number of countries (probably most European countries).

And when matters are to be dealt with in very concrete terms, in many cases even this distinction will not be sufficient, as very diverse forces claim to be anticapitalist.

The mechanical transposition of a specific model to other countries has led many comrades in the International to speak out for an almost unspecified "broad party", even in regions and cases where we could not really expect the creation of an anticapitalist force.

We have to draw up a frank balance sheet of our work in "broad parties" because in various countries the formation of "broad parties" has met with failure. In Italy PRC has taken a steady rightward course. In Brazil, the "broad party"

project, PT, which even seemed anticapitalist at its beginnings has evolved towards a neoliberal project.

Behind the anti-neoliberal party/anticapitalist party debate, we can discern the older debate opposing reformist party and revolutionary party. One of the key points is the attitude towards the bourgeois state apparatus.

Anti-neoliberal parties and government participation

The debate on “broad parties” has developed in two discussions: about building anti-neoliberal parties and building anticapitalist parties. The project for left renewal through building broad parties is the outcome of several erroneous conclusions:

* Is it really important or even primordial to build (perhaps even above all on the electoral level) an alternative to the social-democratic governments as so many texts of the International and EACL state? Isn't it much more important and finally, more decisive, to build an alternative to ruling-class policies? Thus, doesn't this mean building resistance from below and not fostering the illusion that we can present a governmental alternative?

This has several implications. It is true and undeniable that good electoral campaigns, and in consequence good electoral outcomes can provide an encouragement and important boost to spreading revolutionary ideas. But this must not be overestimated or become the only goal. Finally, it is primordial to support work among workers, to do organizing work, to build links with other components of the existing extraparliamentary movement while building this movement. The International must clearly reject shortcut or breakthrough strategies. IST's strategy for example is closely linked to a programmatic shift.

By calling for the building of an alternative to social-democratic governments, aren't we fostering illusions in terms of the actual relationship of forces in the real possibilities coming out of a vote for ... a broad party? Given the actual relationship of forces (at least in Europe) we must recognise that we are very far from a context in which the vote for a left party could considerably change the relationship of forces by providing this alternative a victory. Either this alternative is not truly representative of the class struggle, or else it is a substantial force in the class struggle, in which case it won't win the elections and will remain a minority; in most cases a very small minority.

In no way does this mean our ideas and proposals will remain in the minority. Not at all! But under the conditions of parliamentary politics, the bourgeois order and the relationship of forces, in the middle term other majorities will only surface during great struggles and mobilisations.

Given the decline of left forces and the stagnation in most countries in recent years, some comrades have drawn the conclusion that more than ever before we must obtain electoral successes in order to find a means of emerging from the working class's defensive situations through changes in the electoral party panorama. Another erroneous idea, the outcome of the search for a shortcut, is combined with this. It is no longer really important to strengthen the “class struggle” forces within the class itself and strengthen the revolutionary organisation (or organisations). What has become most important for the comrades is the size of the organisation; independent of the force behind the political and programmatic bases of a possible regroupment or fusion. For years now we have become overcome with joy at the first inklings of an ongoing regroupement. Then we are taken aback when after a very short time, this experience proves unviable and a poor political response to the demands of the class struggle.

Here we must question above all the prized concept of “plurality”. What is so positive in plurality per se, at first sight?

If the term puts the emphasis on the plurality of sources and origins and if we can put forth a concordance as to central class struggle question, we will be able to doubtless observe that it has a considerable political success as an effect.

But usually this term refers to or suggests something else, that is ongoing political differences whose impact is played down – via compromises on formulas or setting aside certain questions. At an extreme, we can get the impression that we must not only produce this plurality but also have the task of keeping it going, making it permanent.

Why is the emphasis so often put on plurality? Is a less pluralist party necessarily less effective or less democratic? But representativity is not necessarily linked to the pluralistic nature of a party. Is it harmful to the success or historical justification for a party if this party is less pluralistic than for example the Brazilian PT or PRC in Italy? Was the Spartakusbund split from SPD an error? In our tradition we have always considered that they should have left SPD at least 10 years earlier, to form a combative, class struggle party as Lenin did. As we know Trotsky rallied Lenin's positions. Do we no longer share these convictions?

Anticapitalist party and broad party

Too often the International's statements and articles centre on electoral successes, hoped for, achieved or not. In our press there are countless articles giving us the impression that electoral politics and winning parliamentary mandates are the supreme goal of our work.

Another grave error in the orientation of the International and its sections flows from this. If winning parliamentary mandates (or more broadly, good electoral results) has become the supreme goal, then comrades will soon be ready to make political concessions in order to achieve good results by forming coalitions with other forces. This does not imply that it isn't allowed to have electoral agreements among revolutionary forces. Moreover common candidacies – as long as these are based on a revolutionary and class struggle programme – can be useful. It doesn't seem to us that this is necessarily the best choice in each specific case, but a common candidacy cannot and must not be ruled out straight off.

Here it is necessary to recall one of the principles of revolutionary propaganda. Revolutionary Marxists have always remained faithful to the conviction that unity of action ("all together") is something very precious. The best example of the application of this principle is the Bolsheviks' line in 1917 when they struggled ("all together") with other forces for the slogan "land, bread and peace", mobilising broad sectors of the oppressed classes, culminating in the revolutionary struggle in autumn 1917 and the fall of the old regime. But Bolsheviks and revolutionaries always propagandised for another society (for socialism) under their own banners. What can only be done for a very limited time is joint propaganda alongside another organisation. Such propaganda must start out from the class struggle and implacable antagonism to the capitalist system and the bourgeois parliamentary order.

We do not consider it useful to apply a universal tactics for the building of "broad" parties, "anti-neoliberal" parties or "anticapitalist" parties. Often such tactics get blown up into strategies, which – in the best of cases – prove to be mere chimeras when confronted with the reality of concrete traditions, evolutions and perspectives of the actual workers' movement in different countries. In the worst cases, schemas are imposed on sections, causing them quite a few problems. We are not opposed in principle to similar tactics or those of the same kind on the international level, but we see them as useful only in the context of an international upturn in workers' struggles, for example as in the years 1917- 23, 1934-37, 1968-1974/75). During defensive periods, the differences between workers' movements in their respective countries are much starker, so it is much harder to apply a common tactics. And it goes without saying that this cannot be resolved via Zinovievist methods. Independent of such considerations, we insist on

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maintaining strategic principles on an international level, such as non-participation in bourgeois governments, the struggle against war, for building social movements, to build class struggle tendencies in trade unions, for women's liberation etc.

Resolution from the RSB political secretariat, 12 November 2009.