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Fourth International

17th Congress: Analyse, act, build

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Opening the 17th Congress of the Fourth International in the year of the fiftieth anniversary of 1968, our comrade Alain Krivine recalled the convergence of international struggles and mobilizations: the Vietnamese NLF's Tet offensive against US imperialist troops, relayed by the anti-war revolt on campuses in the USA, the Prague spring, student movements in Poland, Japan, Italy, Germany, in Brazil against the military dictatorship, the French May 68 and concluded by the mobilization of Mexican students with the massacre of the Place of the Three Cultures by DÃ-az Ordaz's army.

This was a reminder of these anti-imperialist and anti-colonial struggles, the mobilization of youth on an international scale, but also the powerful general strike of 10 million workers in France for several weeks and the Italian "creeping May" that followed. This turn of the late 1960s was a powerful stimulus for tens of thousands of activists and promoted the building of many revolutionary organizations including sections of the Fourth International. This was the spirit that Alain brought to the congress, a perspective open to the future, the international convergence that was seen in full light in 1968 is today echoed in the multitude of fightbacks and struggles occurring throughout the world.

The contrast between this evocation and the present situation made particularly obvious the need to work on analysing the world situation, reviewing the activity of social movements and the building of anti-capitalist organizations.

Indeed the discussions covered many issues that have emerged since the previous congress of 2010. The climate of the congress reflected both the weight of attacks and setbacks, and the real involvement in struggles and fightbacks and perseverance in efforts to bring together radical forces.

Those who were present want to think and build based on the achievements of an activist International committed to building political convergence at the heart of all social struggles. Today, our International brings together 55 sympathizing sections and organizations in 40 countries, bringing together more than 13,000 activists.

This congress took stock of a situation marked by the revolutionary explosions of the Arab region, the experiences of the Latin American popular governments, the outbreaks of Indignad@s, Occupy and Nuit Debout, the Greek people's resistance to the injunctions of the Troika, massive feminist mobilizations against violence, rape and femicide to push for women's rights. But it is also marked by the power of Trump, Putin, Erdogan, Netanyahu and Duterte and the reactionary drift of many governments in Europe. All these political elements are occurring in a context of prolonged crisis of a capitalist system accumulating financial, ecological, social and political crises.

In this period the popular and revolutionary movements have not succeeded in firmly countering reactionary offensives and in particular the challenges to social gains won in the old industrialized countries in previous decades. The revolutionary upsurges in the Arab region have given way to reactionary governments, and in Bolivia, Ecuador, and Venezuela, popular governments have not kept their promises of economic transformations that would challenge the system. The capitalist offensive against the Greek people succeeded in making the Tsipras government play the role of executor of the Troika attacks. Finally, in Europe as well as in the Middle East and Asia, reactionary religious forces have been able to take root in popular layers, developing violent campaigns against women and LGBT people.

The delegates expressed their desire to build our International because the past years have confirmed the need to regroup to act in a world where wars, violence, attacks against the workers and oppressed have weighed even more heavily, increasing the need for solidarity, internationalist coherence, and also for an anticapitalist and revolutionary

orientation, addressing the problems at their root.

Analysing the situation

In the first place, there was a debate on the current phase of capitalist globalization and the analysis of the imperialist powers, the political chaos and its implications. [1] Analysis of the balance of power between US imperialism, which, even weakened, remains the main military power, master of the main economic levers, and the dynamic rise of China which has an imperialist policy through its military presence in the China Sea and its power of international economic investment. The vast majority of delegates agreed with this framework. At the same time, interventions underscored the internal resistance to the Trump Administration's policy and the power of women's mobilizations and responses to racist violence in the US. Other comrades testified to the aggressiveness and increasing presence of Chinese capital in Latin America and Africa, grabbing control over vast areas of farmland, jeopardizing traditional production and social fabric. The important presence of comrades from Asian countries brought to the discussion all the dimensions of this chaotic social situation in which, nevertheless, our International is developing strong organizations, well established in the popular classes, in particular in Pakistan and the Philippines.

America and Europe were solidly represented among the 180 activists who participated in the debates of this congress. The presence of delegates from our North African organizations and that of comrades invested in the tasks of internationalist solidarity, allowed the situation in the Arab region to be present in our debates, in spite of the absence of delegates from the Middle East – apart from Turkey – as well as from sub-Saharan Africa except South Africa, reflecting both the real difficulties of coming to Europe but also the weakness of our forces. [2]

The second debate dealt with the capitalist destruction of the environment and the eco-socialist alternative. [3] This was the third world congress to deal with this issue, which was already put at the heart of our work in 2003. Unfortunately, the situation has only become even more catastrophic in the past 15 years. The resolution adopted emphasizes the essential responsibility of the capitalist system rather than of humanity in general, in the destruction of the environment. There was a general agreement to fight at the same time against climate change and for the eradication of the capitalist system as a mode of production. This goal requires that people take control of their destiny, not relying on the working of the market as part of a green capitalism but acting to meet their social needs, starting with the public appropriation of resources, while questioning the extractivist policies and useless mega-projects. The debate highlighted the place of women and peasant communities in these struggles, the role of Via Campesina and the militant involvement of our organizations, particularly in the Philippines, Bangladesh, Pakistan and Brazil, but also in Canada, the USA, especially against the Keystone pipeline, and in Europe in the mobilizations around the COPs of Copenhagen and Paris, as well as through the protests in France against the project of Notre Dame des Landes airport, or in Germany around the movement of civil disobedience Ende Gelände (“it stops here and now”) which opposes lignite mines.

The next debate focused both on the analysis of growth and wage transformation on a global scale - with the rise of precarious forms of employment, and the record of resistance movements and popular clashes. [4]

The comrades defending two minority resolutions insisted on the numerical growth of the working class at the world level and its central place in the struggles. [5]

For the majority, the problem posed to us is in no way that of a numerical decline of the working class. On the contrary, over the last 10 years, there has been a growth in wage labour, both in production and in services, particularly in the new industrialized countries. But this numerical growth is coupled with a political weakening of the workers' movement due to several essential causes: one is the crisis of the traditional reformist, social-democratic

and Stalinist organizations in the old industrialized countries, in the case of the first as a result of their policy of managing neoliberalism, and for the second dragged down by the fall of the Stalinist systems. Another element of weakening comes obviously from the defeats accumulated in recent years, within Europe and on the American continent the frontal attacks through the policies of social compromise, seeking to undermine many gains in the field of employment and social protection. Likewise, the development of new working classes, particularly in Asia (China, India, Turkey, etc.), has not occurred in the same context and balance of power as in the 20th century. This defensive situation has not, however, broken the will of the exploited and oppressed to struggle, and the social struggles, for example, in the Maghreb, Latin America, Europe in recent years have shown this fighting spirit.

The discussion also highlighted several strengths: the affirmation of workers' combativity in the new industrialized countries, the decisive weight of young people in all the mobilizations of these last years and the place of the feminist movement with generations of young women activists animating not only feminist struggles but being at the heart of all fights. Further to this, several delegates emphasized a strong interconnection between battles in the workplaces, issues of discrimination, the environment and the fight against sexist violence. These links are even stronger in all the struggles carried out in rural areas, often against the multinationals and military interventions. Experiences of resistance, as well restarting production in a self-managed framework in factories and rural areas were also underlined.

Many young comrades, especially women, spoke in this discussion, testifying to their intervention in the mass movements and enriching the debate, both on the trade union struggles in Italy or the US and on mobilizations of the youth, as well as solidarity in Pakistan around our comrade Baba Jan, threatened with life imprisonment for taking part in peasant mobilization against land evictions. In the end, the authoritarian drift of many governments has not diminished the power of many actions challenging capitalist exploitation and oppression. [6]

Our role and party-building tasks

The last point – on the role and tasks of our International and its sections – was the point of convergence of the previous discussions and of the questions on which two alternative platforms had been formed. [7]

In recent years, our debates have focused on several of our sections' experiences in building broader parties, playing a useful role in the class struggle and leading the fight against capitalism and the lessons have been learned from the recent experiences of our comrades in Podemos in the Spanish state, the PSOL in Brazil, the Awami Workers Party in Pakistan, the Bloco de Esquerda in Portugal, the Red and Green Alliance in Denmark, or the orientation towards Syriza.

The debates focused on several issues: the situation of aggressive capitalist globalization, chaos and international disorder has not closed the door to revolutionary eruptions and major political crises. Anti-capitalists on a global scale today have heavy responsibilities: to build political organizations useful for resistance in everyday life and capable of facing crises posing the question of power. Faced with the criticism of two distinctly minority positions, the text adopted by the Congress defends the need to keep both ends of the process. Resistance requires forging tools that oppose austerity policies, no matter where they come from. All the situations discussed during this congress thus show the double need to build, where possible, broad and effective political convergences and to defend within them an important anti-capitalist and ecosocialist orientation. This confirms the choice to maintain in all cases the organization of activists of the Fourth International.

This congress confirmed the work of cohesion, reflection and political agreement that rejuvenates the leaderships of our organizations and of our International. It is also the strength of this process that makes it possible in countries

where divisions take place within our sections, as has recently been the case in Brazil and Italy, for the International to remain a strong link that in the long run enables us to reunite our forces in a common organization, as has just been the case in Germany.

The presence of several new organizations that were invited for the first time, such as the Brazilian MAIS and the Pakistani The Struggle, also testifies to this desire for democratic convergence in our International. From the same point of view, also in Brazil, the MES now has the status of sympathizing organization of the Fourth International.

Finally, the Congress was an opportunity to reaffirm our choice of building our International, developing our analytical and programmatic thinking through regular seminars, the development of our educational Institutes in Amsterdam, Manila and Islamabad and the initiative of an annual gathering of young people in Europe. These efforts are paying off in the rejuvenation of the new elected leadership. On the other hand, among the participants in this congress as a whole, there were only 25% women, although many FI organizations had respected parity in their delegations and there are 40% women in the new leadership.

PS:

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[1] The resolution adopted is here [Capitalist globalization, imperialisms, geopolitical chaos and their implications](#).

[2] At the 17th World Congress delegations from the African, American (north and south), Asian, Australian and European continents were present – as members, sympathizers, permanent observers or guests – which explains why there could be several from the same country. The delegations were: Algerian, Antilles (Martinique-Guadeloupe), Argentine (three), Australian, Austrian, Bangladeshi, Basque, Belgian, Brazilian (eight), British, Chinese, Croatian, Danish, Dutch, Ecuadorian, French (four), German, Greek (two), Iranian, Irish, Italian (two), Japanese (two), Kashmiri, Moroccan, Mexican (three), Norwegian, Pakistani (two), Peruvian (two), Filipino, Polish, Puerto Rican, Quebec, Reunionese, Slovenian, Spanish state, Sri Lankan (two), South African, Swedish, Swiss, Tunisian, Turkish, United States (three), Venezuelan (two). The Congolese, Corsican, Indian, Indonesian, Lebanese, Russian and one of the two Swiss delegations as well as one other Mexican organization could not be present at the Congress.

[3] See the resolution adopted [The capitalist destruction of the environment and the ecosocialist alternative](#).

[4] See the resolution adopted [Social upheavals, fightbacks and alternatives](#).

[5] The Platform for a Revolutionary International [Let's seize the opportunities, and build an international for revolution and communism](#) and "New Era..." [New era and tasks of the revolutionaries](#).

[6] The Congress a statement of solidarity with Rohingya people [Solidarity with the Rohingya refugees in Bangladesh](#).

[7] See the resolution adopted [Role and party-building tasks of the Fourth International](#).