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1991 World Congress

“For a revival of Internationalism!”

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THE DELUGE of iron and fire which is falling on Iraq shows the true nature of the “new world order” championed by George Bush. The end to the “cold war” between Moscow and Washington has given way to new “hot wars”, as terrible as those we knew in the past decades, from Korea to Algeria; in Vietnam, in Afghanistan...

Despite the decline of its relative economic power, the United States is trying to fully restore its capacity for international political and military action, which had been limited for a long time by its defeat in Vietnam in the 1970s and the victory of the revolution in Nicaragua. The invasion of Grenada, the military operations against Libya, the intervention in Panama, the support given to the Nicaraguan counter-revolution, the increased support given to the Zionist state confronted by the Palestinian intifada and the threats against Cuba, all show the USA's desire to bring the peoples of Latin America - and those of Asia, Africa and the Pacific - into line. The Arab-Persian Gulf crisis gives the USA an opportunity to reaffirm its role as the world police.

The gravity of this situation should not be underestimated. Never since the Vietnam war have the imperialist powers brought together such military resources in one theatre of operations. Never since the Korean war have they been able to deploy them under United Nations cover. Never have they been able to intervene on this scale with the backing of the USSR and China. And social democracy (through different Western governments) is participating directly in this operation at a scale, in many respects, unprecedented.

An ability to mobilize against imperialist interventions

All those who continue to fight for internationalism must face up to bigger responsibilities today. They must deal with the most urgent tasks: imposing an end to the war and the withdrawal of imperialist troops from the Gulf region. But they must also prepare for new outbreaks of aggression in other parts of the world by bringing together a substantial ongoing force to mobilize against such attacks.

Numerous western military bases have been established, from Asia to Africa and Latin America. Among others, they shelter American, British and French troops. Rapid intervention forces have been set up in the imperialist metropolitan centres, able to take themselves anywhere - particularly to the Third World. If we want to avoid the endless repetition of bloody interventions, continuous since the Second World War, this worldwide mechanism must be dismantled.

The world economic crisis accentuates these tensions, thereby making more probable new military adventures in the dominated countries. Attacks on economic, social and political rights are stepped up. Western governments are imposing austerity on workers. Hunger riots are multiplying in the Third World. Bureaucratic repression, as in the USSR and China, remains a threat. It will, of course, take time to overcome the disorientation caused by the experience of Stalinism, by its crimes and by its failure. In these conditions there is a great danger of the peoples' and workers' movements becoming demoralized, thrown onto the defensive, and revolutionary struggles isolated. There is a great danger that still more social and political struggles will become disoriented and be led astray, degenerating into the blind alley of ethnic, communal or religious confrontations.

The obligation of solidarity

To face up to this situation, it is urgent to begin new internationalist solidarity actions.

Internationalism is a duty (of solidarity) towards all the exploited, all the oppressed, all those who struggle. It is necessary for their fight. They should be able to count on it - both before and after victory - because the pressure exercised by imperialism never lets up, as was illustrated yet again by the policies followed by Washington against revolutionary Vietnam and Nicaragua.

Nothing is more dramatic than to see a Third World people rising up courageously for national and social liberation remain isolated in the face of imperialist intervention. Or to see a young victorious revolution worn down by a diplomatic and economic blockade by Western powers, bled dry because the international workers' movement measures out aid with an eyedropper. Or to see big workers' strikes suffocated because the bourgeoisie has been able to find elsewhere what the workers in its own country refused it, because the trade-union movement has been incapable of uniting in international action.

The duty of solidarity recognises no frontiers. The upheavals that have shaken Eastern Europe since the end of 1989 demonstrate the extent to which the democratic character of the socialist project must be fully restored to give it renewed vigour. This cannot be done without maintaining constant support for the struggle by the workers of these countries, the Soviet Union and China, for political and social rights. The bankruptcy of Stalinism should make it possible to end the identification of socialism with bureaucratic regimes, thus giving new inspiration to the whole international struggle.

The Western powers have been able to take advantage of the crisis of the Eastern European regimes, as is illustrated by the capitalist reunification of Germany. The economic collapse, the brutal abandoning of social protection measures, the uncontrolled expansion of the market and of unemployment, the activity of the multinationals, are likely to give birth to a new Third World in the heart of Europe. But the opening of borders favours links between workers', feminist, ecologist and anti-war organizations. This is a unique opportunity to develop a battle in which solidarity goes beyond the line of East-West division inherited from the Second World War.

Against the most backward prejudices

For all those working to radically transform our societies, internationalism is not just a practical requirement. It remains an essential value :the antithesis of xenophobia; of racism and chauvinism; of hatred of others: a fundamental component of all socialist and humanist culture. Internationalism is an ethical commitment as much as a political one.

Internationalism thus starts in one's own country, in the struggle against the most backward prejudices: in intransigently taking up the defence of male and female immigrant workers and of oppressed communities, their political rights, their cultures and their languages. In fighting for the real right of nations to decide their own fate.

Pressures in the world today

Internationalism is also an answer to the pressures of today's world realities.

Going beyond countries and continents, the world today is characterized by a growing interdependence on the economic front, of ecological balance, of military relations, of the nuclear threat. The brutal changes that repeatedly occur within the world market have increasingly devastating social effects. New forms of technological and financial dependence bear down on the Third World. Man-made “natural” disasters multiply and have more and more serious consequences. The big questions of our time - from imperialist domination to poverty, from the danger of war to the destruction of the environment - are, from the outset, posed at an international level.

The bourgeoisies of the imperialist countries have made no mistake in this respect. They multiply the consultations and institutions that allow them to act in concert to stifle revolutionary struggles and to maintain their domination over the dependent countries. The “G7 Summit” of the seven richest countries acts as a real world board of directors. The International Monetary Fund uses debt as blackmail to dictate economic measures to the governments of the Third World, condemning whole populations to scarcity and famine. In order to undermine the combativity of workers in struggle, the multinationals threaten to move their investments to other countries. The European powers are consolidating the Europe of Capital against the struggles and social needs of the working class. They all agree that workers should be made to pay the cost of the economic crisis. They all agree that the gains of previous workers' struggles, whether social security, maintaining their buying power, job protection or trade-union rights should be challenged.

The European bourgeoisie talks about ensuring the free circulation of products and people inside the “single market”. But at the same time it is reinforcing security and authoritarian measures that restrict the right of non-Europeans to enter Community territory. The hunt for immigrants will be fiercer than ever. Despite the humanitarian proclamations of heads of state, the status “political refugee” has already been seriously attacked. And Western police forces are cooperating more closely than ever in the struggle against “terrorism”. The imperialist bourgeoisie is preparing for us a world that will be even less free than it is today.

We are confronted with a paradoxical situation. A century ago, the workers' and socialist movements was the bearer of the “new idea” of internationalism. Today, these movements seems to be even incapable of effectively coordinating social struggles for elementary rights for men and women workers. Today it is the bourgeoisie, despite the sharp contradictions which set its different national components against each other, which is, increasingly, organizing itself on an international level.

An alternative policy

Those countries with bureaucratically-centralized economies, from China to the USSR, after an initial period of growth, are being hit hard. For many people, the socialist perspective has lost its credibility. The very hope for a more just and humane society is now being challenged. The ideologues of the established order take advantage of this to laud the virtues of the capitalist market at the very time when the right to work and to health for all is at question in the imperialist countries and a real crisis of decomposition is threatening in a growing number of capitalist societies in the Third World.

To give socialism back its credibility, the false dichotomy between capitalist market economy and bureaucratic planning must be broken. There must be another form of growth which gives working men and women real control over socio-economic priorities and whose driving force is the satisfaction of human needs. This third, truly socialist and democratic, road implies a profound change in international relations, and not simply in national policies of economic development.

Internationalism is indispensable to the application of such an alternative growth policy.

It is possible to move forward along this road today. In Europe this means to counterpose to capitalism's choice - the 1992 Single Market - the workers' choice; fighting together for the social, cultural and political rights of all the people's of the continent, East and West. It means giving a new stimulus to the fight against debt - a yoke that now hangs around the neck of East European as well as dependent countries - which is an essential element of the international economic crisis. It means deepening the fight for the rights of workers and young people, for women's liberation, for equality between nations, for the defence of the environment, against nuclear power and the danger of war. And it means defining a different aid policy for the Third World in the imperialist countries.

The Western policy of “aid” to the so-called developing countries is defined in terms of the interests of the multinationals. It aims to consolidate the alliance between the imperialist metropolises and the neo-colonial bourgeoisie, who grow fat on corruption and embezzlement of public funds. It thus perpetuates dependencies... dependency of the dominated countries within the world market and dependency of the people on the existing regimes. It is in Africa, perhaps, that the consequences of this situation are worst. This because the balkanisation of the continent means division into mini-states incapable of ensuring their own economic survival. Revolutionary socialists in Africa must coordinate their forces to renew a militant anti-imperialist pan-africanism, to counterpose to the current development a free confederation of the peoples of Africa.

In Latin America we are witnessing a new offensive by US imperialism under cover of the Bush Plan, which is supposedly setting up a “free trade” zone from Alaska in the north to Tierra del Fuego in the south. This project aims at profiting from the defensive situation of the continent's workers in order to consolidate US hegemony. Its consequences will be disastrous for the entire working class in this part of the world, including in the USA and Canada. A united fight has to be undertaken on a continental scale to stop this plan being put into operation, and to defend and extend social conquests.

1992 will be the 500th anniversary of the start of the conquest of Latin America. In opposition to those who want to use this occasion to rehabilitate colonialism, it is important to show, particularly in the metropolitan centres of the former world empires, that anti-imperialist solidarity remains on the agenda. It is also important to make more widely known the struggle led by the indigenous communities of the continent against the destruction of their natural environments, against repression and super-exploitation and the disintegration of their communities and cultures... or even indeed direct genocide.

The responsibility of revolutionaries

The internationalist fight is not an easy one. It comes up against considerable obstacles. The synchronization and convergence of struggles does not happen naturally; the situation differs too much from one country to another. Each political, social and revolutionary movement has its own history, its own framework of national development.

In particular, the workers' movement does not currently possess any form of organization which can stand up to that of the big multinationals. The bourgeoisie knows perfectly well how to play on divisions among the proletariat to try systematically to break their capacity for international solidarity. It uses, and abuses, the fear of unemployment and competition between wage earners. This is particularly dangerous today, in a situation where the crisis, already ravaging the peoples of the Third World, is now bearing down on the working class in the West, leading to a revival of ethnic or religious conflicts and of the most irrational forms of racism.

This internationalist struggle is all the more difficult as it has to be fought against the stream. Revolutionary internationalism has been in decline for a long time. It has been buried by the social-democratic parties, which turned back to the nation states and supported colonial or world wars involving their own bourgeoisies. It has been

condemned by the bureaucratization and Stalinization of the Comintern, by the subordination of the Communist parties to Moscow's diplomatic interests, by the division of the world communist movement - as well as by the dramatic isolation in which too many national liberation struggles have found themselves. The “tragic solitude” of the Vietnamese, faced with the American bombings, denounced by Che Guevara (in his vibrant Tricontinental appeal) continues in the “tragic solitude” of the Palestinians and many other peoples in struggle today.

The truth is that workers' and progressive organizations pay far less attention to coordinating their struggles than do the bourgeois governments. The European trade-union movement has not yet been capable of undertaking an overall campaign within the EC to defend workers' interests, despite the preparations for the Single European Market, and indeed its imminence.

A living tradition

But internationalism is not a wild dream. It is a real possibility. It showed its strength during the major struggles of this century. Just after World War I, an extraordinary upsurge of internationalism followed the victory of the Russian Revolution and the formation of the Third International. The Spanish Civil War (1936-39) represented a real tragedy. The victory of Francoism and the march towards world war were made more possible by the international isolation of the Republican camp. But the epic of the International Brigades, formed by activists from all progressive and revolutionary currents, fighting alongside the peoples of the Iberian peninsula (regardless of the specific political orientations of their members) remains a real example for us all.

Since then, despite slowness, failures and abandonment, anti-imperialist solidarity has more than once brought real help to national liberation struggles: the aid networks for the Algerian revolution; the worldwide mobilization against the US war in Vietnam; and, more recently, the movement against apartheid in South Africa and the support for the Central American revolutions. Workers' solidarity has been demonstrated more than once, such as in the defence of the Polish workers' movement in 1980 and (although it was unfortunately insufficient in relation to what was at stake and what was necessary) during the big British miners' strike in 1984-85. The vigour of the anti-missiles and anti-war movement in the first half of the 1980s also testifies to the internationalist resources that we can count on.

1968 - the year of the Tet offensive in Vietnam, of student struggles in Mexico and Argentina, of the general strike in France, of the big workers' struggles in Italy and of the “Prague Spring” in Czechoslovakia - symbolized the internationalist spirit of the 1960s' youth radicalization. This receptiveness of young people to internationalism is a precious potential. It is still shown today in a number of countries: in the anti-racist and Third World solidarity movements; in the Nicaraguan work brigades and in the campaigns against debt.

Today, the living tradition and potential of internationalism are expressed as much in the development of new social movements, in the international meetings of the women's movement, in the immediately international dimension of anti-nuclear, pacifist and ecologist mobilizations, in the coordination of the struggle against debt in Latin America, in the regional initiatives taken by progressive movements in Asia and in the Pacific. In a number of regions of the world it is also expressed in a new feeling of solidarity between indigenous communities and peoples suffering from oppression and cultural genocide, in the active development of the Christian base communities and in support for the final anti-colonial struggles such as that of the French-dominated Kanaks.

Despite all the difficulties, the fight to revive internationalism is one that is both necessary and realistic. It plunges its roots into a venerable and living workers' tradition. It is enriched through new experiences. It benefits from considerable potential resources among young people, the women's movement and contemporary struggles.

It is our duty to carry this fight forward in the best way possible.

Organizing ourselves

To do so we have to organize.

Without concerted action, internationalism will be stillborn. In order to act together, the largest number of people must be involved.

In the trade unions, international relations must not be solely the prerogative of the federal and confederal leaderships. Meetings of direct workers' representatives from the same multinational or sector should be organized. Inter-union solidarity that ignores frontiers should become the rule.

The same goes for the social movements, meetings between non-governmental and popular organizations, peasant and community associations, feminist movements, student and youth movements should be stepped up.

A dense network of international relations should be formed at all levels: from grass-root groups to national structures; from associations to parties; from North and South and from East to West

Internationalism and International

What is true for trade unions and associations is true for political parties. To nurture an internationalist consciousness and a truly internationalist practice they also need an international organization.

For a long time the sections of the Fourth International have been involved in building such an International. Not because they all want to be the same. Each national organization has its own political profile, its own united front relations and its own responsibility and competence to make decisions. Each tries to learn from the history and tradition of struggles of its own people.

Our organizations joined the Fourth International, because they are internationalist and because they pursue the same goal - all of them fight for socialist democracy. This in order that:

- the essential lessons of the history of the workers' movement are not lost, but transmitted to new generations, in new countries;
- activist organizations from all continents meet on an equal footing, and so that new experiences of contemporary struggles are shared by everybody;
- they can educate themselves in an internationalist spirit and express this essential element of an overall revolutionary perspective in action;
- they can better defend organizations hit by repression and give more help to developing revolutionary forces where

these are still non-existent or embryonic;

– and so they can orientate themselves politically, given the necessity of having a militant knowledge of world reality in order to understand the upheavals that are taking place.

It is also to prepare the future, to make a first step towards the goal of building an International with member organizations that are revolutionary parties with a real mass implantation. We know that we are not that organization. Our sections are too weak to claim that. But we hope that, thanks to our political traditions and our international structure, we will be able to play an active role in preparing for this future International.

This, building a new international, is probably the most difficult of all internationalist tasks to achieve and the one that will take the most time. No revolutionary current is sufficiently strong today on a world scale to do it alone. But we think that it is also one of the most important tasks. This is why we want to win other revolutionary organizations and political currents to this perspective. To work together to build a revolutionary International rooted in mass struggles in every continent.

In solidarity and unity

The first internationalist act is active solidarity. There is no point in waiting before acting together. It is in this spirit that the Fourth International is launching an appeal for united action to all revolutionary and progressive organizations and to all activists.

Internationalist solidarity is united by nature

Our sole guide should be: effectiveness. Effectiveness demands unity: to defend those who struggle, those who suffer, those who are hit by repression we must bring together our forces.

Solidarity should enable each of us to go beyond ideological and organizational sectarianism in action. Over and above political divergences, it should bring all organizations and movements, all those who are ready to be involved, together in common campaigns.

Faced with repression, in defence of human rights and struggles, nothing should divide solidarity.

Solidarity should be united in its forms and in its objectives, giving support to all those who fight, without deepening the divisions that sometimes exist in the different components of a popular struggle.

Solidarity must be lasting

Long-term solidarity activity must correspond to the protracted struggles of the oppressed and exploited peoples of the world. Unity must guarantee dynamism and the continuing nature of an internationalist engagement.

Solidarity must be free of state-imposed constraints

In today's world, state apparatuses have great weight. Like popular movements, revolutionary organizations can be led to try either to win the support of foreign governments or to obtain their neutrality. In this field as in others the solidarity movement must help them.

Solidarity should not depend on the ups and downs of the diplomacy of a capital of the so-called socialist camp, whether Moscow or Beijing, or of European social democracy. To prove that it really expresses internationalist, revolutionary, values and that it is not simply at the service of the particular interests of a government or a party, it must be really independent of governments.

Popular struggles must be supported unconditionally: whether these are liberation struggles in Salvador, in the Philippines, in the Basque country or Eritrea; or workers' struggles against capitalist Europe; or the anti-apartheid fight of Black people in South Africa; or Polish, Russian or Chinese workers' struggles for their political and social rights.

For all that, solidarity should not hide reality. To fight effectively today against the imperialist war policy in the Middle East in a spirit of internationalism, it is necessary to have denounced and to continue to denounce the liquidation of opponents and the massacre of Kurds by the Iraqi dictatorship. The crimes of Saddam Hussein must not be covered over.

Learning from each other

Internationalism is an irreplaceable occasion for learning from each other.

Each organization has to draw lessons from the history of the international workers' movement, of national liberation struggles, of the success and failures of popular struggles, of revolutions and counter-revolutions. Political discussion and the exchange of experiences between different movements and national parties are indispensable.

We are convinced that our programme and analyses deserve to be known. They express a living, militant international reality, a historical continuity that we consider to be precious. But we also know that we are indebted to the experiences of other currents, that we have learned from other movements, for example in the recent period, from the ideas of feminism and the thinking of the ecology movement.

International cooperation should make it possible to compare analyses and orientations, strategies and programmes which will be an enriching experience for all. This was the imperative need expressed at the major meeting of Latin American left organizations held in July 1990 in São Paulo, Brazil.

Internationalism demands respect for the political and organizational integrity of each national party, it requires reciprocal relations and mutual support. Political differences are often important between different political organizations. They cannot be ignored, in order to be overcome them they must be discussed. Joint action should help to overcome them. Over and above the differences and divergences we all belong to the same camp, that of the exploited and oppressed.

A school of democracy

By acting together in solidarity, we will show that we know how to respect pluralism in the progressive and revolutionary movement and how to overcome factional practices that have been so damaging. Through unity we will learn to have more respect for the democracy and autonomy of the workers' and other people's organizations.

Then, through example, we will contribute to give a new credibility to the socialist project.

Real internationalism is a living school of socialist democracy.

Bring together our forces!

Fight together to give new life to true internationalism!