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France

Building a new anti-capitalist party

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Following on the meeting of the National Leadership (DN) of the LCR over the weekend of May 17-18, some elements on the progress of the process of building the new anti-capitalist party (NPA)

On what information are these elements based?

– on information coming directly from towns and departments, synthesized each week in an inventory of the situation sent out in the national circular of the LCR;

– on a questionnaire that was filled out by the members of the DN concerning the NPA committees in their department.

1. How many committees are there?

This information is still partial but gives us a fairly reliable estimate of the number of committees: at the present time we can calculate that there exist a minimum of 250 committees already established and active, and at least a hundred in the process of being set up. Moreover, in a series of cities and departments, activity around the NPA has started but is not yet sufficiently advanced for us to consider that a committee is being set up. In all, activity is under way in more than 80 departments [out of 95 in Metropolitan France].

2. What form do they take?

1. In general they are set up on a geographical basis.

The great majority of the committees already existing or in the process of being set up are established on a geographical basis. There also exist also several dozen youth committees, often organised around universities or high schools. On the other hand, committees based on industries or workplaces are still very few, which undoubtedly reflects the difficulty of this work. The majority of the industrial committees are centred on the health sector, some are organised by rail workers or teachers and one functions in the Paris region with workers from 12 enterprises of the graphic industries.

2. The size of the committees.

It varies, between committees which function through well-attended general meetings based on a town or a department and others which are very small (less than 10 people)

3. Who is involved?

a. On the number of people involved.

It is still difficult to estimate. It is certain that several thousand people who are not members of the LCR are involved, and that they are the majority in the process. Furthermore, in certain cases (more than 15 per cent) there was no branch of the Ligue before the NPA committee was set up. So although the existence of a branch of the LCR is an important criterion, it is not always a necessary precondition.

b. The composition of the membership

At the present stage, it is not yet possible to give elements of information in terms of social composition and age. We will have to follow this up.

The new members for the NPA are often trade unionists, members of local or national associations, former members of political parties, but for the majority it is their first experience of being involved in an organized structure. In any case we can see great political heterogeneity, since the process is bringing together ex-members of various parties of the left and far-left, former supporters of Jose Bove's presidential campaign, radical ecologists, libertarians.

c. The ratio of women to men

According to a calculation carried out on a sample of approximately 160 committees, the numerical relationship between women and men is not up to our objective: there are approximately 35 per cent women.

Having said that, this ratio is comparable with that which exists within the LCR. It is nevertheless an important question to work on, because it concerns an essential aspect of the kind of society that we want to build, it is a condition for women to be able to play a full part and for the concerns and the demands of women to be taken up and defended by the future organization.

4. The diversity of rhythms

Seventeen per cent of the committees were established before March and more than 70 per cent in March-April, without taking into account the committees that are in the course of being established.

That confirms the desynchronization that we have noticed since the beginning of the process, but it is actually quite limited, since work basically started after the municipal elections. We should nevertheless note that a series of areas and departments are very much in advance of the rest: the Haut-Rhin department around Mulhouse, Aquitaine (in particular Gironde and the Pyrenees-Atlantiques), Brittany, Franche-Comte, the city of Paris, Midi-Pyrenees (in particular Tarn and the Toulouse area of Toulouse), the Nord/Pas-de-Calais region, Upper Normandy (Le Havre and the Rouen conurbation) and the Bouches-du-Rhone [the area around Marseilles].

Although some towns and departments are reporting difficulties in launching the process, this only represents a small minority, to which we have to give help. In the vast majority of cases, it is enthusiasm which prevails, and even a certain astonishment on seeing the extent of the interest and dynamics provoked by the project.

In conclusion

The first phase of the process is an indisputable success: the interest and the dynamics are there, the political delimitations defined by the appeal launched at the LCR congress already seem to be collectively accepted, in particular as regards independence with respect to the Socialist Party. The discussions cover every possible subject,

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on the need to organise as a party, on democracy and internal functioning, on the link with mobilizations, on trade-union intervention, on how to address a broad audience, on strategic and programmatic questions; and the activity of the committees themselves has really started.

It remains to amplify this phase in places where things are less advanced, but especially to pass on to the second phase, of the stabilization of the committees in terms of participation and commitment. In general there exists a solid core made up of members of the Ligue and of non-members, the latter taking their share of responsibilities for the political and organisational aspects of the process (this is a decisive element, in particular for the second phase), but we sometimes see, beyond this core, that there is some turnover. We have to make sure that the party that is being built becomes a place that everyone feels is theirs, which means that we have to have more thorough collective discussions on the party, its functioning, its programme, but also that we have to strengthen its activity, anchored in local and national mobilizations.