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Fourth International/16th World Congress

The International becomes a perspective

- IV Online magazine - 2010 - IV422 - March 2010 -

Publication date: Thursday 4 March 2010

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To recount the 16th congress of the Fourth International, we could begin by speaking of the reconstitution of the Russian section of the International, a kind of return to the sources: the Fourth International was founded at the initiative of Leon Trotsky in 1938, in the wake of the struggle and defeat of the Left Opposition to Stalinism, destroyed in Russia during the 1920s and 1930s.

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The Sixteenth World Congress

Photo: Inprecor

We could continue by noting the presence of many Latin American organizations, starting with Marea Socialista, which is part of Chavez's United Socialist Party in Venezuela and proposed to strengthen political and international unity so as to respond collectively to the proposal for a Fifth International launched by the Venezuelan president. We could stress the importance of the birth of the Nouveau Parti Anticapitaliste in France, regardless of its contradictions and its growing pains, constituting the main novelty of European politics as well as the dynamics, under other political latitudes, of the German left.

However, to reflect the success represented by the 16th World Congress of the Fourth International - which ended on February 28, 2010 at Ostend, Belgium, on the North Sea - we prefer to cite three elements:

* Firstly, participation. Delegates, observers and guests coming from a good 40 countries helped develop a debate powered by the presence of all the continents, from Australia to Canada, Argentina to Russia, China to Britain, and Congo to the United States. To succeed in bringing together in one place over five days, in completely self-financed manner and without any institutional support, so many organizations, is not an easy thing.

* Then the fact, that for the first time the new International Committee elected at this Conference is more than 40% female. And there were many young members. The international Committee is a "federal" body, which means that each national reality has its own representatives. There is no "rebalancing" of the central bodies - history taught this international current that a political line cannot be imposed from above, still less by a "guide" party - the composition of the international Committee therefore reflects a generational renewal, a change of mentality and a new political and social reality.

* The third element was the major political and organizational discussions, focused on the future. The Congress turned towards the East, to Asia, with a fundamental role played by the Philippine organization, the already mentioned presence of the Russians (Socialist Movement Vperiod), the Polish Party of Labour (PPP) invited, the orientation of the Hong Kong group in China and the new Japanese organization under construction. But above all with the important and decisive presence of the Labour Party Pakistan (LPP), a significant organization, whose national Congress in January ended in a rally involving over ten thousand workers, peasants and, especially, women.

Revival

For the Fourth International this was a renewal, a symptom of the overcoming of the difficulties of the 1990s and the first decade of the 21st century. After a series of defections or divisions and a loss of perspective, the discussion concerning the possibility or, at least, the will to consider a "new international" – the fruit of a possible political

The International becomes a perspective

process, initiated by the choices made in France, by the attendance of organizations such as the Pakistani one or by the debate taking place in Latin America - has provided a fresh impetus and a new internal debate. The political process that must be watched carefully is the construction of "new anti-capitalist parties", broad and with a mass influences, including "the current response to the crisis of the workers' movement and the necessity of its reconstruction". A perspective that has an organic, international character without however resulting automatically in a "line" that should be followed slavishly everywhere.

A perspective, we should emphasise, which coincides with the desire and the project to strengthen this political current which has now existed for more than seventy years, but which retains considerable vitality, as evidenced by its ability to devote a session of its debate to - and approve a new resolution on - climate change, considered one of the main novelties of the new century and a decisive battle in the "capital-labour" conflict. Moreover, this attention to new themes and new subjects of conflict had been shown already in the previous Congress which approved a resolution on the anti-globalization movement and the LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered) issue. There are not many revolutionary Marxist organizations which can integrate, or even aspire to integrate, in their programme questions which were so controversial in the history of the labour movement. Indeed, there is no other.

Obviously we have to keep a sense of proportion: we are talking in various parts of the world of small political organisations, sometimes small groups, even if generally they are activist collectives inserted in their national, social and political reality. But the fact of belonging to an international framework helps the preservation of a certain vitality and the ability to maintain a thread and a common discussion. And thus to respond now to current challenges, such as the possible convening by the Venezuelan Government of a debate for a Fifth international. The propagandist nature of this proposal and the complexity of an invitation from a head of government escaped nobody. At the same time, and this has been stressed repeatedly, the hypothesis gives new credibility and a new visibility to the conception of the International, the fact that this dimension is crucial to confront capitalist globalisation and its crisis. And it is no coincidence that, besides the proposal from Chavez, there is another, originating from the US Znet website, with, among its first signatories, people like Noam Chomsky, Michael Albert, Vandana Shiva, Michael Löwy, John Pilger and many others.

The Congress decided to participate in this debate while maintaining intact its conception of the International, i.e. of a body based on a program, a common perspective (the transcendence of capitalism), internal democracy, social effectiveness and absolute independence from governments. At the same time, Marea Socialista's call for the holding of an international meeting in Caracas, possibly in June, was welcomed positively. Also the question of the social movements was at the centre of discussion, with the commitment to the "Summit" in Cochabamba on global warming, called by the Bolivian President Evo Morales, the various Social Forums - that of the Americas in Asunción, the European Social Forum in Istanbul and the World Forum, in 2011, in Dakar, the Euro-Latin American summit in Madrid next May and that against NATO in November 2010 in Lisbon. Fresh impetus was also given to the Institute for Research and Education in Amsterdam, which will be supported by two new "regional" centres, in Manila and Islamabad, whose symbolic importance is obvious.

At the European level, in addition to the above-mentioned emphasis on the Madrid and Lisbon summits, it is important to put in motion the process of convergence of the anti-capitalist left, beyond formulas and forms, necessary to advance common reflection and, above all, to initiate common political campaigns. In this connection, the Congress voted in favour of the organization of thematic conferences to discuss various issues with a view to taking common initiatives. The first meeting will be dedicated to the economic crisis and in particular how to effectively oppose it in three aspects: redundancies, and attacks on pensions and public services.