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Debate

Towards a new International?

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The 'Fifth International' is not the "spectre haunting Europe and the world" of which Marx wrote in the 'Communist Manifesto', but is an idea that is beginning to circulate. Recently, a French employers' newspaper - the 'Bulletin des industriels de la métallurgie' spoke of the danger of a Fifth International. I do not know from where they got this idea, but before speaking of the Fifth International, it is necessary to make a brief balance sheet of the four historic internationals.

[<https://www.internationalviewpoint.org/IMG/jpg/09marx.jpg>]

The First International, founded in 1864 in London, had Karl Marx as the author of its inaugural Manifesto, which concludes with the famous formula: "the emancipation of the workers will be the work of the workers themselves". The partisans of Marx and Proudhon participated in the International Working Men's Association (IWMA) - even though the former had much more influence, writing some of the main documents of the International, and relations between the two men were always poor. At the Brussels Congress (1868) the alliance between Marxist and left Proudhonians like Eugène Varlin, future hero of the Commune of Paris, allowed the adoption of a collectivist programme that proposed collective ownership of the means of production. Relations with Bakunin and his supporters were more complex, which led to splits and to the dissolution of the IWMA after its ill-fated transfer to the United States in 1872 (one of Marx's less brilliant ideas).

The IWMA survives only in the form of those anarchist dissidents who consider themselves the heirs of what was founded in London in 1864. Its existence today is rather symbolic, but in 2001, the more dynamic and open currents of libertarian socialism established a network of 'Libertarian International Solidarity' (LIS) in 2001. It includes important organizations like the Confederación General de Trabajadores (Spanish state), l'Alternative Libertaire (France), the Uruguayan Anarchist Federation and so on. In addition, we have in recent years seen a significant development of anarchist currents inside the anti-neoliberal movement, some affiliated with the IWMA, others to the LIS, but many without international affiliation.

The Second International, founded by Friedrich Engels in 1889, was torn apart in 1914 with the support of its sections for the imperialist war. It was reconstituted in the 1920s, with a definitively reformist orientation, and reorganized itself once again, under a new name (that of the Socialist International (SI)) after World War II. The SI is currently a quite heterogeneous collection of parties and movements, mainly of European and Latin American origin, going from liberation fronts - like the Sandinistas or the Front Farabundo Martí - to pro-imperialist parties, like Tony Blair's New Labour. A social democracy of moderate tendency - that is, social liberal - predominates, like the German SDP, the French Socialist Party, Spain's PSOE. Its objective is no longer, as at the time of Friedrich Engels, Wilhelm Liebknecht and Jean Jaurés, the suppression of capitalism and the socialist transformation of the society, but rather the 'social' management of neoliberal capitalism. The Socialist International does not effectively function as a political organization, but rather as a discussion club, an area of political-diplomatic negotiation.

[<https://www.internationalviewpoint.org/IMG/jpg/09lenin.jpg>]

The Third International was the most significant attempt to create an international association of proletarian parties with an anti-imperialist and revolutionary character. In spite of many authoritarian characteristics and a discipline of the military type, it was, during its first years (1919-1924) a genuine internationalist body, in which figures like Antonio Gramsci, Clara Zetkin, Andrés Nin and Jose Carlos Mariategui participated. After the death of Lenin, it became progressively transformed, under the leadership of the Stalinist bureaucracy, into an instrument of the Soviet policy of the "construction of socialism in one country". Even so, authentic internationalist aspects survived among Communist militants, as shown by the significant participation in the International Brigades in Spain (1936-38).

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In 1943, at the request of his allies Churchill and Roosevelt, Stalin dissolved the Communist International, without reducing the total political, ideological and organizational dependency of the Communist Parties of the world towards the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU). With the disintegration of the misnamed 'actually existing socialism' from 1989 onwards, the heirs of the Third International entered a crisis that has taken them, with few exceptions, towards political marginalization or conversion to social democracy. Some parties, like Communist Refoundation in Italy, succeeded in genuinely reorienting themselves, breaking with their Stalinist past and taking a new direction, radical and open to the contributions of the social movements.

[<https://www.internationalviewpoint.org/IMG/jpg/10trotsky.jpg>]

The Fourth International, founded by Leon Trotsky in 1938, emerged out of the International Left Opposition, an anti-bureaucratic tendency inside the Communist International. Weakened by the assassination of Trotsky and numerous other leaders - either at the hands of fascism or of Stalinism - and by innumerable splits - it was never able to transform itself into a mass movement - even if its militants played an important role in the events of May 1968 in France, the movement against the war in the USA, and the resistance to the dictatorships in several Latin American countries. The Fourth International sought to salvage the heritage of the October revolution from the Stalinist disaster and to renew with the help of its militants and leaders - Ernest Mandel, Livio Maitan, Hugo Blanco, Raul Pont, Alain Krivine and Daniel Bensaÿd - the theory and practice of revolutionary Marxism.

The Fourth International - to which the current author belongs - has grown stronger in recent years but it remains a weak organization both numerically and in terms of resources. With the exception of the Philippines and Sri Lanka, its forces are essentially concentrated in Europe and Latin America. Its militants have participated, as an organized current, in the foundation of broader regroupments, like the PRC in Italy, the Socialist Alliance in England and Wales, the Left Bloc in Portugal, the Frente Amplio in Uruguay and the Workers' Party in Brazil. Unlike other groups or sects who identify with Trotskyism, the Fourth International does not consider itself as the sole revolutionary vanguard and its objective is to contribute to the formation of a new international, of a mass character, of which it would only be one component.

The question of internationalist resistance to capital has acquired a burning actuality today. Capital has never managed to exert such absolute and limitless power across the planet. Never before could it impose, as it does today, its rules, policies, dogmas and interests on all the nations of the world. Never before has there been such a dense network of international institutions - like the International Monetary Fund (the IMF), the World Bank (WB), the World Trade Organization (WTO) - destined to control, govern and administer the life of humanity according to the strict rules of the capitalist free market and free profit. Never before could the multinational companies and the financial markets exert in such a brutal way their global dictatorship. Finally, never before has the power of a sole imperialist state, the United States of America, been so extensive and so arrogant. Today we are witnessing, as sub commander Marcos wrote in his message to the 'European Zapatistas' (August 28, 1995), a true war of money and the forces of international financial capital against peoples, humanity, culture and history.

The offensive of capital and the neoliberal governments at its service - which began in 1980 with Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher - reached its height after the fall of the Berlin Wall and the capitalist restoration in the countries of Eastern Europe. The 'death of utopia' (or of the revolution, or of Marxism) and the 'end of history' were proclaimed triumphantly in all the capitals of the West.

It was in this context of defeat and disorientation of the left that there came, like a spark of light in the dark, the Zapatista uprising of 1994. And, two years later, the First Intercontinental Encounter for Humanity and Against Neoliberalism took place in the mountains of Chiapas - an event that had a world-wide impact and that brought together, for the first time in very many years, militants, activists and intellectuals of several tendencies, the North and the South, Latin America, the United States and Europe. From this meeting came the historical call to build the international of the hope against "the international of terror represented by neoliberalism" as the Second Declaration of La Realidad puts it, the immense task of creating "a collective network of all our struggles and specific resistances.

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An intercontinental network of resistance against neoliberalism, an intercontinental network for humanity. This intercontinental network will, recognizing differences and similarities, seek to link up with other resistances worldwide. This intercontinental network will be the means through which the different resistances learn from one another".

The meeting at Chiapas in 1996 can be considered as the first act of the great movement of anti-neoliberal struggle that manifests itself now in every corner of the planet. Although this initiative did not have any direct follow-up - the attempts to organize other encounters of this type, inspired by the Zapatista example, in Europe or Latin America were not successful - it was the point of departure, the moment of birth of a new internationalism, anti-neoliberal and anti-imperialist.

Some years later, the great protest at Seattle took place (1999) and became the main vector of this new internationalism, the Movement of Global Resistance - falsely characterized by the rightist press, as the 'anti-globalization' movement. This 'movement of movements' would trigger the protests in Prague, Stockholm, Brussels, Bangkok, Washington, Barcelona, Genoa and, more recently, Florence - with the participation of tens, then hundreds and now a million demonstrators - and the World Social Forum held in Porto Alegre (2001, 2002, 2003), the European Social Forum (2002) and other local or continental meetings.

This movement for another world is broad and, necessarily, heterogeneous. But it emerged with an immediately worldwide, international and internationalist character. In spite of its diversity, there is agreement on some fundamental principles: "the world is not for sale"; "another world is possible"; "no to war". They are general principles, but if they are defended seriously, they have a deep subversive potential. Unity also exists around some concrete demands: the abolition of the debt of the countries of the South; the suppression of tax havens and the imposition of the tax on financial transactions; a moratorium on transgenic products and so on (the list is already long). In short, there is a broad consensus on the identification of the enemy: neoliberalism, the IMF, the World Bank, the WTO, the US empire. On the alternative to the dominant order, we see a broad range of answers, from the 'regulation' of the system to its revolutionary (socialist) transformation.

This diversity can be an obstacle, but it is also a source of strength. The Movement of Global Resistance involves trade unions, feminists, Marxists, anarchists, ecologists, Christians for liberation, socialists of several colours and shades, peasant and indigenous movements, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), intellectuals, and many young people, women and workers without another affiliation, but who wish to protest, march, fight and discuss with others. It is a unique occasion for encounters, debate, mutual learning - a process of cultural interchange in which each actor, without abandoning their own ideas and convictions, discovers those of others, and tries to integrate them in their thought or practice. The mixture and fusion of all these ingredients is creating an explosive cocktail, the new internationalist culture of the Movement of Global Resistance. This process is still in its beginnings, we are still far from having a common direction, but we can sense the formation of a common spirit of the movement, radical, combative and hostile to institutional attempts to co-opt the movement.

[<https://www.internationalviewpoint.org/IMG/jpg/11bangkok.jpg>]

Anti-war protests - Bangkok..

The Movement of Global Resistance, or at least its most organized expression, the World Social Forum (WSF), already has a certain degree of international organization. An International Executive Committee already exists, and a Parliamentary Forum was set up last year in Porto Alegre. But these bodies, like the Forum itself, are very heterogeneous, and they do not function as an international political force. Their objective is more limited; the organization of the World Social Forum and the continental forums. More important is the network of social movements - Via Campesina, the Brazilian MST and CUT, ATTAC and so on - who constitute the main force in the WSF and who have published a document containing some elements of political analyses - anti-imperialist and anti-neoliberal - and a call for common protest initiatives.

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Does this amount to a 'Fifth International'? No, for two obvious reasons: 1) we are talking about social movements and not political organizations and a project of global social transformation 2) the Movement of Global Resistance and its bodies are very heterogeneous - as they should be - including sectors who still believe in the possibility of a regulated, humanized, national and democratic capitalism. The same heterogeneity is found also inside the International Parliamentary Forum.

What is lacking is a network of political organizations - parties, fronts, movements - that can propose an alternative project inside the Movement, going beyond capitalism, and the perspective of a new society, with neither oppressor nor oppressed. Something of the sort exists already in Europe - the Conference of the European Anti-capitalist Left, which involves the PRC (Italy), the LCR (France), the Left Bloc (Portugal), the Socialist Alliance (England and Wales), the Red Green Alliance (Denmark), and several others. In spite of their differences, these currents share a similar rejection of capitalist globalization, neoliberal policies and imperialist war. They also share the aspiration to a 'positive' alternative, anti-capitalist and anti-patriarchal, ecological and internationalist: "a socialist and democratic society, without exploitation of labour and oppression of women, based on a sustainable development - a socialism from below, self-managed". (Declaration of June 2002 of the Conference of the European Anti-capitalist Left).

[<https://www.internationalviewpoint.org/IMG/jpg/11andalucia.jpg>]

...Andalucia...

If this experience could be extended to other continents, to constitute a network that included, in a broad manner, the most radical political positions in the great Movement of Global Resistance, we would have a 'New International' which need not necessarily be called the 'Fifth' because not all the currents would necessarily identify with the history of the workers' and socialist Internationals of the past. It could be called the 'International Conference of the Anti-capitalist Left', or the "Tendency for the New International" or any other name that could be invented by the creative imagination of its participants.

This new international could selectively integrate the positive contribution of the four proletarian internationals. It would be the heir of Babeuf and Fourier, Marx and Bakunin, Blanqui and Engels, Rosa Luxemburg and Lenin, Emma Goldman and Buenaventura Durruti, Gramsci and Trotsky, Emiliano Zapata and Jose Carlos Maria'tegui, Augusto Caesar Sandino and Farabundo MartÃ-, of Ernesto ChÃ Guevara and Camilo Torres, of Ho-Chi-Minh and Nazim Hikmet, Mehdi Ben Barka and Malcolm X - and of many others. However, its main reference point would be the existing social movements and, in the first place, the Movement of Global Resistance to neoliberalism.

Of the internationals of the past, it would perhaps be the First that could serve as inspiration - although obviously in the political conditions of today which are totally different - as a multiple, diverse, democratic, movement in which different political opinions could converge in thought and practice. This does not mean that the form in which the IWMA was constituted and functioned can be repeated today. It is impossible to anticipate what organizational forms this new internationalist force could have - decentralized federation, organized network, or simply a conference with periodic meetings - but would necessarily have to be flexible, open and without formal bureaucratic structures. Ideally, it would include not only parties and fronts, but also left magazines, research groups, organizations of social movements, intellectuals.

[<https://www.internationalviewpoint.org/IMG/jpg/11berlin.jpg>]

...Berlin

How could we delimit the political-social field of this new international? It seems evident to me that anti-imperialism and anti-capitalism - that is, the conviction that the suppression of capitalism as a worldwide system is a necessary condition, even if not a sufficient one, for the abolition of social injustice, exploitation and oppression - are essential criteria. The perspective of a new society, free, democratic, egalitarian, solidaristic, ecological, feminist - for me and my comrades, a socialist society, but that can be an open question - is another essential element. But it is in the process of formation of this network, or federation, that we would define the common bases and the political platform of the New International.

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The New International would have much to learn from the Zapatista experience. Before everything the spirit of revolt, anti-conformism, irreconcilable opposition to the established order. The 'Intergalactic' Encounter of 1996 defined the struggle against neoliberal capitalism - be it against the commodification of the world or of the human being - as the common objective of all the oppressed and excluded, workers, farmers, indigenous peoples, women, virtually all of humanity which is the victim of the neoliberal madness. This struggle is, therefore, a struggle for humanity, for the dignity of human beings - a concept that has everything to do with the revolutionary humanism of Marx and Ché Guevara, but also with the experience of the indigenous communities of Chiapas.

Another great contribution of the Zapatista Army of National Liberation (EZLN) is the articulation between the local - the struggle of the indigenous people of Chiapas for autonomy - the national - the struggle for democracy in Mexico, and against US imperialist domination - and the international - the war against neoliberalism and for humanity. In thought and practice of the Zapatistas, the three movements are intimately linked, in a very much more dialectical vision than the poor formula of some NGOs: "think globally, act locally".

Finally, Zapatismo contributes to the internationalism of the 21st century a new universalism, neither abstract nor simplistic, but based on the recognition of difference - the aspiration to "a world in which many worlds fit".

Where must we begin? As our comrade Daniel Bensaid puts it, the departure point is the irreducible force of indignation, the unconditional rejection of injustice, an attitude of non-resignation: "indignation is a beginning. A way to get up and to begin to walk. Once you are indignant and have rebelled you can see later what happens".

If we can rally the forces which, across the planet, are motivated by indignation against the existing system, rebellion against the powerful and the hope that another world is possible, we will have the ingredients of a New International - with or without a number