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Youth Camp

"This isn't our globalisation, let's build another world"

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Olivier Besancenot will speak at the opening rally of the Fourth International youth camp on Saturday 27th July in southern France. One of the striking features of his election campaign, both in the meetings and in the votes, was the high percentage of young people who supported his candidacy. We asked Olivier, who was himself a leader of the JCR - the youth organisation in solidarity with the LCR - and was one of the group that organised the FI youth camps in the early 1990s, to tell us why he thought this was an important initiative.

[<http://internationalviewpoint.org/local/cache-vignettes/L400xH201/09camp-f634d.jpg>]

Q What is the Fourth International youth camp?

A The camp is an extraordinary occasion of political conviviality which takes place every year in a different country each time. It's an occasion for several hundred young activists from all over Europe, and sometimes from further afield (Brazil, Mexico, Algeria...) to come together to exchange their experiences.

How do they fight against the fascist and populist parties in their countries? How can we build the anti-globalisation movement at the European level?

Each participant can fix their own programme of discussions, workshops, films, around the main themes of the week which are outlined in the morning forums. These mark the stages of the discussion over the week but it is this openness of activity which makes the camp such a success; there is a sufficiently broad choice of activities and themes for everybody to find their own particular centres of interest.

[<http://internationalviewpoint.org/local/cache-vignettes/L170xH250/10camp1-72461.jpg>]

Q What do you mean by political conviviality?

A I spoke of political conviviality because it is really an occasion when the most serious discussions take place in a relaxed and agreeable context. And then it's true that besides the political activities there the discos, the music... These are two inseparable elements of the camp: we won't make the revolution if we don't change our relationship to politics and our methods of political activity. More and more recent experiences, in Europe and elsewhere have shown that it is possible to be very radical, even revolutionary, and have a festive and dynamic activity. Recently in France the struggles of young casualised workers in fastfood (McDo in particular) used forms of new forms of struggle and activity that made people want to participate.

Obviously, we're there for political discussions and activity, but also to do it differently.

Q Why an international camp?

A For many of the participants it is also their first contact with the youth organisations in solidarity with the Fourth international, and their first opportunity to participate theoretical education and wide ranging discussions, or simply to discuss with other people and experience internationalism as a living experience. It is one of the richest aspects of the camp: that there are young people from all the most important struggles and movements in Europe. This makes it possible to come out of your little national cocoon, to see that other people have the same problems and the same struggles, or to see that the problems are different from one country to another.

Q What's it like being in the camp?

A It's a space outside the everyday life of an activist, or even a bit outside everyday life at all. Of course, it's not socialism in one camp, but almost all the tasks are shared and self-manages: cleaning the toilet blocks and the site, running the bar, organising security, and the political activities. And we try to ban all forms of discrimination, racism, sexism, anti-gay and lesbianism. And during this week we try to put into practice egalitarian and open social relations: no paternalism, no machist competition, freedom in sexual relations... Of course, this isn't easy, and the camp is also for that: to try to learn to live in social relations free of everything imposed on us by a male chauvinist and capitalist society. But as nothing in this is "natural" or easy, we have to explain, to convince people and above all create specific spaces to discuss these oppressions and how to challenge them. So there is a women's space and a lesbian and gay space, and also a women's only party so that young women can see what it is like to have a good time without having to put up with guys trying to chat them up or their boyfriends being jealous.

[<http://internationalviewpoint.org/local/cache-vignettes/L183xH200/10camp2-f5b60.jpg>]

Q What will be special about the camp in France this year?

A This year, for us in France, the camp will have a special role. With the presidential campaign and, after the first round, the anti-fascist demonstrations in which lots of young people were active, our two organisations, the JCR and the LCR, are attracting more and more people who want to get politically involved, or others who have been around for a long time and have now decided to join.

So we hope to have a lot of new people at the camp and it will be an opportunity to convince them that the fight for another society is not only at the level of one country or even one continent, but is an international fight! And to show them that on that point we have a certain experience: both as a political current which has always been internationalist and an international organisation which has for years has built itself over and above the borders, so that we today we are very much in our place in all the mobilisations against capitalist globalisation. For us the fact that questions are dealt with at the level of the whole planet is not simply encouraging because that shows that internationalism is coming back to life, and also a confirmation of what we have always said, the revolution will be a world revolution or it won't be a revolution!

Q So what exactly is the programme of the camp this year?

A The main theme is the need, the urgency to build another world. Capitalist, imperialism, warmongering globalisation is obviously not the globalisation we want. So we are going to try to explain and understand all the different aspects of this globalisation in order to fight better on each particular front and also against the totality: economics, militarism and war, neo-colonialism, law and order policies, specific oppressions (of women, of lesbians and gays, or young people in particular), privatisations of public services, attacks on workers' rights, racism, the destruction of the environment... We're also going to take a particular look at the regions where there are dramatic situations, like in Palestine or in Africa.

But we also have to explain why it's necessary to organize, to learn from experience of different struggles and movements, to discuss plans and possibilities for a future society... We try to look at all the questions from an internationalist standpoint.

That's what we have always done but the need to do so is even stronger now with the new world situation and the recent struggles against institutions like the IMF, the World Bank and the World Trade Organization.

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This is the first time for years that we have been in such favourable conditions, in Europe and internationally, for rebuilding and consolidating a movement which is on the offensive and capable of winning new generations of activists to the struggle to change the world.