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Fourth International

Fourth International grows rapidly in Asia

- IV Online magazine - 2012 - IV447 - April 2012 -

Publication date: Monday 30 April 2012

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Alan Thornett from Socialist Resistance, the British section of the Fourth International reviews the growing strength of the Fourth International in Asia, starting from developments at the recent meeting of International Committee (IC) of the FI earlier this year.

We were pleased to welcome a new organisation, the Communist Party of Bangladesh-Marxist Leninist (CPB-ML) as a permanent observer organisation, a preliminary step to becoming a section. This was another example of a process, which has been evident for some time. The centre of gravity of the FI has shifted towards Asia.

The International is also making important gains elsewhere. The meeting received applications for closer links from organisations in Australia, the USA, and Latin America. Asia, however, has been increasingly the FI's area of expansion.

In the 1970s and 1980s the FI's biggest sections, were in Europe and Latin America. By the early 21st century, after splits in its biggest Latin American sections, Europe had become the dominant region. In the last 15 years or so most of the organisational gains of the FI have been in Asia.

In the post-war years the FI in Asia was comprised of the RMP in Sri Lanka, small groups of comrades in Hong Kong (including those who had regrouped after Chinese Trotskyism was smashed by Mao Zedong) in the 1950s; a group in Vietnam, some small forces in India, and a section in Japan which split and broke up in the 1980s. Today Asia is the biggest region of the FI containing some of its most important sections both in terms of size and social implantation.

This has come about by a process of convergence and regroupment with organisations from a variety of political and ideological origins. These include former Maoists as well as other branches of Trotskyism. It has been facilitated not only by the determination of the FI to reach out to other forces but by its non-dogmatic approach to building an international which has contrasted favourably with other international Trotskyist groupings. The International is open to fraternal relations with other left groups in countries where we do have organisations, as in the Philippines or Indonesia

Asia is a continent of extreme diversity with no common history and many different colonial experiences. There is nothing similar to the history of Latin America, North America, the Arab Region or Europe. It has zones of great instability and social upheavals. It encompasses the emerging economies of China, India, and Vietnam as well as the war in Afghanistan, and numerous geo-political conflicts. These include the Pakistan / India conflict over Kashmir and the Chinese oppression of Tibet. It also includes the confrontation in the Korean peninsula and the national liberation conflicts in Mindanao in the Philippines and the Tamils in Sri Lanka.

Sri Lanka and Philippines

It is also a continent with huge environmental problems: floods in Pakistan, Bangladesh, and China, extreme weather events generated by climate change such as the recent typhoon in the Philippines, plus deforestation, pollution, safe water supplies, the nuclear disaster in Fukushima in Japan and the impact of the emerging economies.

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The International's gains in Asia began in the 1991 with the Sri Lankan NSSP. It joined in 1995 at the 14th World Congress after its expulsion from the Committee for a Workers' International (CWI), the current hegemonised by the British Socialist Party. It was an organisation with strong social implantation, a presence in national politics, parliamentary representation, and a strong base in the unions. It leads a trade union federation. It was, and remains, distinguished by its firm position on the national question and its strong support for the Tamil struggle under difficult and dangerous conditions. Since the crushing defeat of the Tamil national struggle the NSSP continues to campaign in defence of the imprisoned and the disappeared.

During the 2000s two more organisations joined. They were both substantial organisations and from regions of harsh conflict and oppression.

In 2003, at the FI 15th World Congress, the Revolutionary Workers Party – Mindanao (RWP-M) became an FI section. The RWP-M came from a Maoist tradition, though it had moved a long way from Maoism and is now an ecosocialist organisation. It also has a mass base amongst the peasantry, and some indigenous people in highland tribes and the rural poor. It has strong ecological credentials and a record of working around the issue of food sovereignty – the right of local communities to determine what is grown and how it is distributed for their own good rather than for multinational companies. It is involved in the armed protection its own communities while engaging in a 'peace process' with the government.

Pakistan and Indonesia

The Labour Party Pakistan, which had been expelled from the CWI like the NSSP, became a Permanent Observer in 2005. It is an organisation of 7,000 with a base amongst the peasantry, as well as in the working class. It has an exemplary record of opposing the Musharraf military dictatorship. Although most of its leadership, including its women leaders, was jailed it had refused to be driven underground. It opposes both American imperialism and religious fundamentalism.

The LPP has put special emphasis on developing independent social movements. It supported the development of the National Trade Union Federation, formed in 1998, and the Pakistan Workers' Confederation from its beginning in 1994. It helped build the peasant movement, Anjuman Mozareen Punjab, and in 2003 facilitated bringing together more than 22 peasant organisations. It helped to develop the Women Workers' Help Line as an independent women's organisation and a youth organisation, the Progressive Youth Front, in 2003.

The FI has also developed a relationship with the People's Liberation Party (PLP) in Indonesia, which is now a permanent observer. The Indonesian left had to be completely rebuilt after the massacre of communists by Suharto in 1965, during which up to 1 million people died. The PLP came about as a result of a split in the PRD (People's Democratic Party), an organisation built particularly amongst students protesting against the authoritarian Suharto regime. The PRD played an impressive role in the mobilisations which led to Suharto's downfall in 1998. The PLP organises amongst young people and students. It has a strong feminist emphasis and supports the national struggles for self-determination within Indonesia.

Bangladesh

The CPB-ML from Bangladesh, which is now a permanent observer will seek to become a section at the International's next World Congress. The CPB-ML comes from a Gramscian tradition and is a much smaller

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organisation than the LPP or the RWP-M. It also has a mass base amongst the peasantry. They lead two twin peasant federations (one of women, the other of men) the Bangladesh Krishok Federation (BKF) and Bangladesh Kishani Sabha (BKS), two of the biggest peasant organisations of the country.

It is also a highly ecological organisation which seeks to integrate the struggle for peasant rights, women's rights and ecological rights. Last November and December they organised the highly impressive "Climate Caravan" on the themes of climate change, gender and food sovereignty, which went from the North of the country over two weeks with meetings every evening in different villages of up to a thousand people. A fuller report is in this issue of the magazine.

Today the FI forces in Asia include: the NSSP of Sri Lanka, the LLP in Pakistan, the RWP-M of Mindanao. Groups in Japan and Hong Kong were considered at the last World Congress as on their way to becoming sections so had IC members elected provisionally. The PLP from Indonesia is a permanent observer. There are activist contacts in India. Links have also been built with contacts in Malaysia, South Korea and Taiwan.

The work of the FI in Asia has been strongly influenced by the FI's education centre in Amsterdam, the Institute for Research and Development (IIRE), and the courses it runs. In recent years IIRE's have been established in both Manila and Islamabad in order to expand this work. These education centres, Manila in particular, have become centres for the regroupment of revolutionary forces in the region, building links across in the Asia Pacific region including in Australia.