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European Social Forum

Towards a European left party

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On the eve of the European Social Forum, Italy's Party of Communist Refoundation (PRC) organized a two-day meeting (on November 5-6, 2002). On the agenda: the EU and the question of war, social and citizens' rights, an economic perspective and a political alternative; and a proposal for a European political party.

[https://www.internationalviewpoint.org/IMG/jpg/03_florence.jpg]

To this end, the PRC had put forward a document, 'Contribution of the PRC to the discussion on a European Alternative Left', which approached the problems under discussion in four chapters: 'For a Europe of peace', 'For a Europe of economic, social and environmental rights', 'For a democratic Europe', 'The alternative left for Europe'.

A number of organizations from the mainstream Communist Party tradition were present at the meeting: from France, the PCF; from Portugal, the PCP; from the Spanish state: the PCE, Izquierda Unida (IU) and Esquerra unida i alternativa Catalunya; from Greece: the KKE, Synaspismos (a split from the KKE) and Dikki (a split from the 'nationalist left' of PASOK); from Germany, the PDS and the DKP; from Austria, the KP; from Luxemburg, 'La Gauche'; from Holland, the Socialist Party (of Maoist/Marxist-Leninist origin); from the Czech republic, the CP of Bohemia and Moravia; from Cyprus, AKEL; and finally the Israeli CP (it should be said that some of these organizations have attended meetings of the Conference of the European Anti-capitalist Left: the PRC (member), La Gauche (member), the Dutch SP (participant), the IU and DKP (guests).

Also present were a range of organizations from the radical left; the Bloco de Esquerda ('Left Bloc' - Portugal); the Ligue Communiste Revolutionnaire (France); the Socialist Alliance (England) and Socialist Workers Party (Britain); the Scottish Socialist Party (Scotland); and the Red Green Alliance (Denmark). Both the agenda and the participants were exceptional. For the first time in history, organizations from the CP tradition agreed to debate the radical left on the basis of a political text with the perspective of a new European party of the alternative left.

The PRC: the bridge

Only the PRC was in a situation to take such an initiative. This party holds a position as intermediary - 'bridge' as they put it - between the two currents that exist inside this 'alternative left'. Originating as a minority split from the break up of the old PCI in 1992, it succeeded in distancing itself from the heritage of the PCI through the big struggles of 1993-95 and the experience of the Prodi government, at the price of two splits. Subsequently, the battle of Genoa and the emergence of a 'movement of movements', the strongest in Europe, have led to a veritable refoundation of Rifondazione, at its congress in April 2002. [1]

[https://www.internationalviewpoint.org/IMG/jpg/04_florence.jpg]

This refoundation is reflected in the new Party programme (and the discourse-programme of Bertinotti), which breaks with Stalinism, including the rightist aspects of Togliattism. At the same time, an internal reorganization has allowed radical currents (like the comrades of 'Bandiera Rossa') to participate in the leadership of the Party, creating a genuinely pluralist party. This political transformation of the PRC is one of the determinant elements serving to sharpen differentiation within the CP tradition.

A sort of triangle has emerged, with the other poles represented by the PCF, which supports a social-liberal politics, including participation in government, and the KKE, which is attached to the Stalinist heritage and the domination of

the CP over the social movement, combining a social radicalism in the struggles and a 'blind' anti-imperialism (pro-Milosevic and pro-Saddam) with the rejection of the new radicalization incarnated by the global justice movement.

This radical evolution of the PRC has allowed its leadership to adopt a new approach to the radical left, still very much a minority current, but very active in the social movements and making progress on the electoral front.

Responding to the results of the French elections, the PRC newspaper commented: 'these elections have definitively closed the history of the centre-left in Europe and in the world. (...) In France, as in Italy and Europe, refoundation is on the agenda'. [2]

The debate

In general, the parties present intervened in the discussion, without engaging in debate, although the opinions held are firm and the contradictions strong. For the CP tradition debate of this kind is not a habit, unlike in the Conferences of the Anti-capitalist Left.

The interventions were similar enough: 'a tip of the hat' to the PRC, a presentation resting on their analyses and activity, a verbal agreement on the dual proposal of common lists for the European elections of June 2004 and a European political party of the alternative left. However, the document prepared by the PRC, which is supposed to be the basis of a political agreement, was effectively forgotten.

The only 'dialectical' moment of the second day was the debate between the LCR and the PCF concerning the government of the plural left. Our viewpoints are known: the dynamic of the situation is determined by the politics of war and neo-liberal offensive with the EU as institutional structure. It is necessary to oppose it radically through political campaigns, social mobilizations, a break with the EU and the fight for another Europe.

That presupposes an alternative programme, social and democratic, which involves throwing the EU into crisis. There is certainly a space to act together; we can align around convergences. The political test is that of government: to participate in a government dominated by social-democracy on a social liberal programme is incompatible with an overall strategy which seeks to break this offensive and force through a programme entirely favourable to the exploited and oppressed classes.

The tension in the room mounted several degrees: the spectacle had no precedent. However there was no clash; on the contrary, the PCF representative argued point by point against the LCR, defending the line of Hue and the experience of the PCF in the Jospin government, while entering some corrections for the future.

Radical left and social-liberal left

[https://www.internationalviewpoint.org/IMG/jpg/23_sud.jpg]

The dynamic in the workers' and social movement points very clearly to the polarization between the social-liberal left, with European social-democracy as its motor force, and the radical left which defends an anti-capitalist alternative. That is not entirely the end of the problem, however.

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The emergence of the global justice movement profoundly affects analyses of society, political line, modes of organization, and behaviour on the ground. It throws down a challenge to all the political parties, as across the world millions of the young and not so young occupy the street and hundreds of thousands are engaged in building 'new' organizations. A broad reorganization of the workers' and social movement is underway.

The social-democratic parties today are in difficulty after their expulsion from government (and even in government in Britain and Germany!), will try to rebuild in opposition, without abandoning the neo-liberal programme. Unity of action with them around concrete demands is not to be ruled out. For the 'moderate' CPs the temptation to 'prepare' the advent of a new 'centre-left' is very strong. That is what is happening with the IU in Spain. It is not ruled out that it will happen in Greece (PASOK + Synaspismos). The test will continue, manifestly in a political situation which will be much more tense and under the pressure of social mobilizations, massive strikes, citizens' and ecologist struggles, and so on. The process of clarification - social-liberal left versus radical left - will deepen in the light of these new experiences. We must follow the behaviour of the CPs attentively.

On the other hand the political party/social movement relationship is affected by the strength - still very unequal from country to country in Europe - of the 'movement of movements', its mobilizations and political potentialities. One aspect of this, and not the least, is the (re)conquest, by a new generation, of the political sphere. That tends to relegate political parties to their most basic function: offering lists at elections. The activists in the 'movement' consider it as a 'political entity' in itself (a 'political subject', as the Italians say) and are not ready to delegate their votes and opinions to the political parties of the establishment. That also goes for the 'revolutionary parties' or rather the nuclei of such parties, often tiny and sectarian. To work now on building a pluralist anti-capitalist 'party' which can approach this new 'subjective' situation implies a new approach.

The experience of the PRC - in the country that constitutes the centre of gravity in Europe - is of great interest: a party that positions itself in parity with the social movement, without seeking hegemony or manipulation. Its activity around the European Social Forum (ESF) and in the 'demonstration of one million' was exemplary.

This is a challenge not only to the CPs but also to the revolutionary left. If the PRC has started down the road to a European party, there is still a lot of hard ground to cover. The Conference of the European Anti-capitalist Left in Copenhagen (in early December) will be the next stage.

[1] See IV 340 - [Refounding Rifondazione](#).

[2] Editorial by Fausto Bertinotti, 'Liberazione', April 22, 2002.