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France

Approaching a political turning point

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Description:

LCR leader Francois Sabado says that May's referendum has the potential for a major shift in the French political terrain.

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1) The French political situation is approaching a turning point. On May 29 there is a referendum to approve the European constitution. However, in an important first, a victory for the "No" camp is possible. This represents a "No" to the entire neoliberal policy followed by all governments for the past 20 years, and a rejection of the dominant parties of the neoliberal right and the Socialist Party.

2) The situation has changed abruptly in the last few weeks. Several months ago - in November-December 2004 - a "Yes" vote was largely taken for granted. All the media and the principal parties of the government supported a "Yes" vote. The Socialist Party, which had organized an internal referendum, had decided by a 60% majority to vote yes along with the rest of European social democracy.



Packed meeting in Grenoble for 'No' campaign....

The pressure of the ETUC (European Trade Union Confederation) was exerted on the European trade union movement. The question that was being discussed was that of the integration or otherwise of Turkey in Europe. The reactionary right and the nationalists raised this question in order to unleash a racist and reactionary movement among the public, with the right rejecting Turkey's entry for cultural and religious reasons. Turkey is a Moslem country and thus has no place in Europe!

3) Today, there is a new situation. The "No" camp leads in the polls, with 52-55% rejecting the Constitution! What's more, support for a "No" vote increased after the televised intervention of Jacques Chirac. There is a majority for the "No" camp among workers and employees, as well as among young people. In spite of the internal ballot in the Socialist Party which was favourable to a "Yes" vote, the "No" camp is now in the majority among the socialist electorate. There is no more talk about Turkey and France's main trade union confederation, the CGT, supports a "No" vote.



...and in Brest.

Approaching a political turning point

The rise in support for rejection of the Constitution represents a social, anti-neoliberal "No", a left "No", because the "No" of the nationalist right has reached its limits. If support for a "No" vote is increasing, it is in direct connection with the conjuncture of social remobilization which the country is experiencing. After the social defeats in 2003, in particular against the neoliberal counter-reform of pensions by the Chirac-Raffarin government, there is today a social dissatisfaction that is reflected in days of action and national strikes and by partial workers' struggles, in particular on the question of wages as in the Citroen car factories.

On March 10 there was a one day strike of the public and private sectors on the question of wages, jobs and in particular against the challenge to the 35 hour working week. And since February, a great movement of high-school pupils against neoliberal reforms in education has developed.

All these strikes give a social colouring to the "No" vote. And it is true that this movement of public opinion towards the "No" camp goes back a long way. It goes back to the great anti-neoliberal revolt of 1995, marked by strikes of civil servants and railway workers across the country and especially demonstrations of millions of employees. Such a movement was reproduced, with its own specificities, in 2003.

But the cumulative character of these experiences of struggle combined with electoral defeats for right and left wing governments which had implemented neoliberal policies reflects a deep rejection of neoliberalism in the country. And this referendum appears in the eyes of the broad masses as the opportunity to say "No", to oppose neoliberal policies and the possibility of inflicting a defeat on the dominant classes and the parties that support neoliberalism

4) For this constitution is not one more European treaty like the others, it is a shackle to lock the people into neoliberalism. It is an anti-democratic process aimed at building an authoritarian European proto-state. In general, constitutions are worked out and decided within the framework of constituent assemblies elected by the people. This is nothing of the sort.

It was a group of 110 experts, deputies and members designated by the governments to a convention which adopted this constitution; in the tradition of the entire process of European construction, a process carried out on the back of the people. But the basis of this constitution is neoliberalism. It is a treaty which "constitutionalizes" neoliberalism and the primacy of profit. In the name of "free and undistorted competition" this constitution subordinates the public services to capitalist profitability and legitimates the processes of privatization of transport, energy and the postal service. It reduces a series of social rights to the simplest expression. Thus the right to work becomes the right "to seek a job" and so on.

5) And this social mobilization has also resulted in a united-front political mobilization of the social and political left: the PCF, the LCR, the left oppositionists among the Socialists and ecologists, the PT, Lutte Ouvrière - even if the latter rejects any united campaign - but above all thousands of trade unionists, campaign activists, non-party people of the left are mobilized in this battle.



Francois Sabado

A left anti-neoliberal foundation involving trade unionists, academics and political leaders has launched an appeal by personalities for an anti-neoliberal left "No". [1] There are now more than 600 "No" committees in the country, holding

thousands of meetings in every town, village and neighbourhood.

It is a formidable united-front battle around the objective of a left "No" vote to the constitution. But we supplement this united-front battle with agitation and propaganda for a "No" to the constitution with explanations of the need for an alternative anti-capitalist policy, both at the level of European construction and at the national level. The unitary dynamic for a "No" vote must be deepened at the political level by the possibility of another policy. These explanations on the need for an anti-capitalist emergency plan should be developed as of now at the heart of the campaign, because the rejection of the constitution on the questions of jobs, the public services, social security, and democratic rights forms the basis for the formulation of a programme in terms of needs, demands and social rights

6) This battle will be all the more significant if the "No" camp wins. In this case, the first demand will be the departure of the Chirac-Raffarin government. It will be deepened by the defence of emergency measures which constitute the content of an alternative anti-capitalist policy which rests on the social struggles and movements. If there is a "No" vote, there will be two consequences at the European level and the national level.

- ▶ At the European level, we must demand a series of measure: a moratorium on public services, an end to redundancies, harmonization of social rights, an initiative of all European social movements and processes on the democratic and institutional questions.
- ▶ At the national level, if the "No" camp is victorious, we will demand the departure of Chirac and the government and we will develop the axes of an anti-capitalist policy which takes 10 emergency anti-capitalist measures, like a ban on lay-offs by profit-making companies, rejection of privatizations and the revival of the public services, a wage increase of 300 euros, the defence of social security, and demolishes everything the right has done by organizing a new distribution of wealth. This is the content of our proposals and we call on the population and the workers to mobilize so as to impose them and control their application. This is also the content of a battle for an alternative and anti-capitalist government at the service of the workers. It is the policy of a government that would be as faithful to the workers as the right is to the employers. Also, the dynamic of a left and internationalist anti-neoliberal "No" could not be reconciled with social liberal governmental solutions within the framework of the European constitution or an amended "light" version thereof.

7) Thus, we will impel a debate across this "No" left of on the content of an anti-capitalist policy and on governmental perspectives, a debate in particular with Communist militants. After such a victory, if the "No" is won, everyone should face their responsibilities: to fall back into the rut of the politics of management of the economy and the neoliberal institutions as all the parties of the plural left have done in the past or to orient towards a perspective of a break with neoliberalism and capitalism, a policy of satisfaction of needs and social rights. Convergence on these questions would be a first decisive stage in the emergence of a new political force.

[1] L'Appel des 200 (Appeal of the 200) launched by the Copernic Foundation. www.appeldes200.net.