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The present moment of the movement in Europe

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Description:

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1 The main fact to be noted in the current phase in imperialist Europe is the wave of self-activity in society over the last two years (since the outburst in Genoa in July 2001) in opposition to war and neoliberal policies.

The working classes have been remobilizing, notably through general strikes, above all in order to defend central objectives (such as pensions). At the same time the new social movement (the European Social Forum) is consolidating itself and confirming its role as a lever, a framework of convergence, and the bearer of a perspective of emancipation. We are witnessing a transition from resistance to the counter-offensive, in the sense that demands, campaigns and struggles are being propelled forwards by a strong desire to change society ("another world is possible").

2 However, this turning point remains very contradictory. The offensive of capital is continuing, and brutally, but without the ideological hegemony and political coherence that the neoliberal monolith had secured for itself during the preceding 20 years. The traditional trade-union movement is still on the defensive; the living and working conditions of the working class are continuing to decline on every level. Nor is the new social movement succeeding in attaining the goals around which it was founded, even though it is continuing to grow stronger as its internal dynamism pushes it onwards. The extraordinary new element is that, by contrast with the do-nothing trade-union bureaucracy, the new social movement appears to be the motor force, taking the initiative and representing the future. But the historic defeat of the traditional workers' movement, under social-democratic and post-Stalinist leadership, has not been wiped out. The trade-union movement is far from having recovered its old position of strength. A new major defeat for the wage earners could demoralize the new social movement, despite its (legitimate) growing popularity in the trade union movement.

3 The brutality of the bosses' policies limits the space available for the class-collaborationist currents (social-democratic parties as well as the "big" post-Stalinist and green parties) that are at the head of the unions or of centre-left governments. Over time a multiplicity of numerous, spectacular political and social experiences, growing self-activity on the ground, and political events that make a big splash in the media in a world situation in ferment are leading towards a clarification without any precedent in recent history. In terms of political orientation, no intermediate option exists between the neoliberal system and a radical improvement in the situation of the lower classes, which implies an abandonment of neoliberal principles and their replacement by anti-capitalist measures. The rising, assertive self-activity in society is subjecting the traditional social-liberal leaderships to a practical test on a grand scale. As long as the social movement keeps going at its current level, the social-democratic currents are incapable of recovering ideologically and programmatically or of finding a new social base. That does not mean that they cannot survive as electoral apparatuses.

4 For the first time in 30 years, the beginnings of a practical, attractive left alternative with a presence in society are taking shape, at least in some European countries.

The ESF, with the capacity it has to take initiatives, is at the heart of the rebirth of an emancipatory social movement on a European scale. It made a spectacular leap forward towards a European social movement between Florence and Paris/St. Denis. Without giving up its global justice equipage, and remaining connected with radical organizing against the policies of unlimited warfare, it took on the dual social question of exploitation at work and women's oppression as well as the fight against the EU as an imperialist state under construction. From this starting point it will be able to move on from a propagandist movement (1) to a mass activist movement that (2) puts down roots in each country by (3) taking up working people's concrete demands.

However, for the moment it remains very much a minority force within the labour movement. It is beginning to influence trade union organizations but, without exception, it is not in a situation to draw behind it a significant sector of the working class.

5 A new stage is beginning in the rebirth of an emancipatory movement. Its dynamic will be determined, as in every historical epoch, by concrete social conditions, its trajectory, its forms of organization, its content, etc.

The traditional trade-union movement is still an important factor in Europe, but it is clearly weakened and very internally petrified. The future will show what kind of dialectic between the new social movement and the traditional labour movement will be at work in the coming mobilizations of the world of labour and in response to the impact of the social movement. There are already some very instructive, but also very varied and uneven, experiences from one country to the next, particularly in countries like Italy, France, Britain and Germany. The key question is undoubtedly the relationship between "movement and party".

6 In the context of this new perspective for emancipation, we are seeing an enormous gap between a new left that is very strong on the social level and very "political", on the one hand, and the virtually universal rejection of organized politics - parliamentary elections, political parties and governments - on the other. Most striking is the rejection of the political parties that are most active in building the movement. There are doubtless many reasons for this: the deep discredit into which institutional political life has fallen and its degradation in the media; the connivance of the leaderships of some big movement organizations with the traditional parties; the policy of subsidizing NGOs; the sectarianism of revolutionary organizations, etc. This is a major difficulty.

At the same time there is a vacuum and therefore a space left free by the existential crisis of the big social-democratic and post- Stalinist parties (as well as some big green parties), which have neither the capacity nor the will to take up the movement's demands.

In this context of global events and an activist movement, general elections take on a different kind of importance as indicators than they have in a totally dead-end political situation. Our task is to be in the thick of these big political and electoral battles: against the right and far right, but focussing above all on fighting against neoliberal policies, war and the EU. Our goal is not primarily to have a visible presence as revolutionary Marxists, but to bring together a credible anti-capitalist, pluralist and European political force. Such a force can take different forms: a pluralist party like the SSP, a bloc like the LCR/LO, or an ad hoc convergence (that could organize itself as a movement afterwards) as in England.

Our task is to give this perspective a certain political coherence and organized form, while remaining aware of the big difference between the national level and the European level. Our goal is to move forward towards an anti-capitalist formation capable of playing an effective role in society and in the social movement.