

Paris meeting advances socialist platform for European workers

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The International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) presented its programme at a public meeting in Paris on June 8. The main speakers were Ulrich Rippert, heading the list of candidates of the German *Partei für Soziale Gleichheit* (PSG) in the European elections, and Peter Schwarz, secretary of the ICFI. Greetings were sent from Bill Van Auken, the SEP's presidential candidate in the US elections.

Held five days before polling day at the FIAP Jean Monnet centre, the meeting was attended by teachers and education workers, students, young workers, immigrant workers and young people.

A vigorous campaign had been carried out throughout the Paris region with teams of WSWS supporters publicising the meeting at the universities of Jussieu, St. Denis and Tolbiac, at the François Mitterrand library and at metro stations near the venue of the meeting. Teams had also intervened in mass demonstrations in Paris in defence of social welfare and in the antiwar demonstration held to protest US President George W. Bush's visit to France. The campaign won many new contacts who wished to be kept informed of WSWS activities in France.

Stephane Hugues, chairing the meeting, welcomed the speakers and explained that the significance of the meeting went far beyond support for the American and European election campaigns. "The meeting represents a new step in the rebuilding of the French section of the ICFI, the Trotskyist movement," he said. The continuity of the Fourth International had been challenged in 1953 by Michel Pablo, the secretary of the Fourth International at that time, who developed theoretical positions to justify adaptation to the Stalinist bureaucracy and the postwar stabilisation of capitalism.

Hugues pointed out, "The Pabloites of the Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire (LCR), Lutte Ouvrière (LO), and the OCI, now the Parti de Travailleurs—all those who adapted to postwar social relations—have become defenders of the old order. That was the meaning of their support, explicit and implicit, for Chirac in the second round of the presidential elections in 2002."

Ulrich Rippert, speaking in German with a translator, expressed his pleasure at speaking in a city that had always been in the forefront of European political developments.

He stressed that the most important question for the French workers' movement, and for workers in Europe and internationally, is that they were confronted "with problems far greater than struggles at a factory level...."

"Anyone who thinks that the class struggle is limited to strikes and mass demonstrations is making a big mistake," Rippert continued. "The class struggle is above all a political struggle, and the most important task confronting the workers today is to understand clearly the political changes that have taken place. Without doing so, any political orientation is impossible."

The Iraq war had profoundly changed the situation in Europe. "The US has undergone a transformation from formerly being a factor of international stability into the greatest destabilising factor," Rippert

declared, adding, "European governments are incapable of mounting a serious opposition to American imperialism."

After World War II, the pacification of the West had facilitated the expansion of American capitalism and strengthened the Western powers against the Soviet Union. This had, nevertheless "created a certain stability and a certain predictability in international relations."

The new American doctrine of preventive war and the subjection of Iraq was only the first step in remodelling the world according to the requirements of American capital. The resistance encountered by the US army had been unexpected.

The ICFI had been "the only party to stress that this war is in fact a reaction by the ruling US elite to the profound crisis of American and international capital," Rippert said. "This is why a change of president at the White House will not fundamentally change the fundamental drive of American policy—as is demonstrated by the unanimous support by the Democrats for the war."

The US, once the world's most powerful economic power, was now the most indebted. The war with Iraq was to gain control of the second-largest oil reserves in the world, achieve geostrategic domination over its Asian and European rivals through military bases in the Middle East, and create a diversion from growing social and political tensions at home, expressed in the enormous gulf between rich and poor.

Rippert went on: "The American working class is like a giant in chains, which will become US imperialism's most formidable adversary when it politically awakens. The two parties dominated by high finance, the Republicans and the Democrats, are finding it increasingly difficult to maintain control."

Rippert pointed out the depth of the conflicts within the US administration demonstrated by the resignation of the CIA chiefs George Tenet and James Pavitt: "The political crisis in the American administration has profoundly shocked European governments. Irrespective of the fact that they pursue their own interests, the European bourgeoisie were convinced of the power and military superiority of US imperialism, which they regard as a guarantor for bourgeois power all over the world. When US imperialism rocks, they see their own rule in danger." Thus, they were prepared to help mend some of the damage created by the occupation of Iraq.

Rippert outlined the relentless assault on social gains and democratic rights all over Europe and cited German Chancellor Gerhard Schröder's "Agenda 2010" as an example. "The EU is increasingly becoming the means to create a European police state," he said. The mass mobilisations against the Iraq war had only been the beginning of far greater class struggles.

The ICFI, Rippert stated, rejects the European constitution and EU enlargement. It declares that "the abolition of all European frontiers and the common exploitation of the material wealth of the continent would create the conditions to overcome poverty and backwardness."

He said that the United Socialist States of Europe could only be

achieved if the European working class united politically. “The working population in eastern Europe and in Turkey are important allies in the struggle against the capitalist interests that decide EU policy.” He rejected the divisiveness of nationalism and regionalism and stressed the need for the working class to act as an independent force guided by the political lessons of the twentieth century embodied in the history and traditions of the ICFI.

Peter Schwarz spoke in French. He said that the war against Iraq raised all the unresolved questions of the twentieth century—imperialist war, colonialism, social conflict—problems for which there was no reformist solution within the framework of the capitalist system.

He reminded the audience that on April 21, 2002, 3 million people had voted for candidates claiming to be Trotskyists in the first round of the French presidential elections. “This is of enormous importance. It is an expression of the revolutionary traditions that are still alive in France, of the work that Trotsky personally carried out in France, and above all of the experiences undergone with the Stalinism of the French Communist Party, which defended the bourgeois order as part of the Popular Front—first in an alliance with General de Gaulle after the war and later in the Mitterrand and Jospin governments.”

He stressed, however, that the radical left organisations, Lutte Ouvrière, the Ligue Communist Révolutionnaire and the Party des Travailleurs had little in common with Trotskyist traditions. They had much more in common with the traditions of centrism that Trotsky fought in France—in particular, the centrist traditions of the Parti Socialiste Ouvrier et Paysan (PSOP) of Marceau Pivert.

In 1936, at the high point of the general strike, Pivert announced the beginning of the French Revolution. He wrote: “The masses are far more advanced than we imagine.... They know that the capitalist world is in its death agony and that it is necessary to build a new world if we want to be done with the crisis, fascism and war.” But even as he wrote these words, Pivert remained in Blum’s Popular front government, which was stifling the revolutionary movement. Trotsky pointed out that Pivert, like all the other centrists of the day—the ILP in Britain, the SAP in Germany, the POUM in Spain—refused to break with the “left” reformist milieu and official public opinion.

Trotsky stressed: “What is most difficult and also most important, in an epoch such as France is going through, is to free oneself from the influence of bourgeois public opinion, break from it inwardly, not to fear its howling and lies and calumnies, and equally to despise its praise and its flatteries. On this condition alone can one be assured the necessary freedom of action, the faculty of hearing in time the revolutionary voice of the masses and putting oneself at their head for the decisive offensive” [1].

The PSOP broke up at the beginning of the war, but its centrist traditions live on in LO, the LCR and the PT. For thousands of people, this type of centrism was merely a transitional stage on the way to a career in official bourgeois politics. Lionel Jospin is the most famous of them; he had been a member of Pierre Lambert’s OCI (Organisation Communiste Internationaliste), now the PT, for some 20 years.

Schwarz outlined the history of the Pabloite United Secretariat, of which the LCR is the French section. The ICFI was founded in 1953 to defend orthodox Trotskyism against the revisionism of Michel Pablo. “Pablo claimed that Stalinism was not counterrevolutionary, as Trotsky had maintained, but, under the pressure of objective events could play a progressive role.” Schwarz quoted passages from David North’s book *The Heritage We Defend* analysing the Pabloite degeneration and emphasised that Pablo’s policies repudiated the independent role of the Fourth International and were aimed at its liquidation.

The Open Letter issued by the US Socialist Workers Party, which led to the founding of the International Committee in 1953, declared: “The lines of cleavage between Pablo’s revisionism and orthodox Trotskyism are so

deep that no compromise is possible either politically or organisationally.”

Schwarz stated that, during the 1960s, the French section of the ICFI, the OCI, had begun to question the validity of the struggle against Pabloism. “In 1968, when thousands of youth turned towards the OCI, Lambert’s party was unable to educate them and rapidly turned in an opportunist direction. Now the PT, of which the OCI was the forerunner, bears all the hallmarks of Pivertism.”

The present-day policies of the LCR, the official Pabloite organisation in France, were even more right-wing than those of Pivert, Schwarz continued. Their attempt to bring together an “anti-capitalist left” involving the anti-globalisation movement, pacifists, sections of the Socialist Party, the French Communist Party and the trade unions was a complete rejection of any revolutionary orientation.

The fate of the LCR’s Brazilian sister party, Democracia Socialista (DS), demonstrated where such politics were heading. DS works as a tendency inside the ruling Workers Party (PT), and one of its members, Miguel Rossetto, is a minister in the government of President Lula. Schwarz quoted an interview with Heloisa Helena, a leading DS member recently expelled from the PT. She told *Rouge*, the LCR’s weekly paper: “The struggles are so intense that after making and burning an effigy of Lula, the peasants did the same for the minister of agrarian reform, Miguel Rossetto. It’s very serious as one of our comrades is becoming, in his turn, the target of popular discontent.”

Turning to LO, Schwarz pointed out that they maintained a purely trade union perspective, and at their recent festival, Arlette Laguiller had not once mentioned the war in Iraq.

Schwarz affirmed that the crisis of American and world capitalism was going to produce fierce class struggles throughout the world and recalled Trotsky’s advice to his comrades: “In order to prepare the party for such a test, it is necessary now to polish and repolish its consciousness, to temper its intransigence, to follow all ideas to the very end, not to pardon perfidious friends.”

This approach, said Schwarz, was at the centre of the political work of the ICFI and its international organ the WSWs.

Speaking from the floor, Antoine Lerougetel pointed out that the two separate demonstrations held in Paris the previous Saturday, one over the issue of Social Security and the other against Bush’s visit, clearly revealed the role of the French left, the radical left and the trade union bureaucracies, who all sought to stifle the political consciousness of the working class. They had consciously worked to keep the issue of the explosion of imperialist militarism separate from the capitalist offensive against democratic and social rights.

They channelled the combativeness of the workers and youth into pressure and protest, avoiding and blocking any discussion of a socialist programme and the development of a socialist consciousness. “Only the supporters of the WSWs opposed these limitations and put forward an internationalist socialist perspective insisting on the political independence of the working class,” Lerougetel said.

An appeal for funds to assist in the development of the French section of the ICFI brought in a collection of more than 200 euros, after which the meeting broke up for informal discussion.

Notes:

1. “Letter to a friend in France,” February 14, 1939, in *Leon Trotsky on France*, New York, 1939, p. 210



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