

The dead end of the Morenoite Révolution permanente's anti-war conference in Paris

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Around 2,000 largely young people attended the May 24 Paris meeting of Révolution permanente (RP), the French section of the self-styled Trotskyist Fraction-Fourth International (FT-CI) led by Argentina's Socialist Workers Party (PTS). The large attendance reflected growing outrage against the Gaza genocide, war and the far-right. Nonetheless, the conference vindicated the International Committee of the Fourth International's (ICFI) warnings beforehand: It was a political dead end.

What youth and workers lack is not outrage, but a clear revolutionary perspective to halt capitalism's plunge into catastrophe. Despite invocations of internationalism and socialism, no such perspective emerged at the conference. On the political struggle needed to smash the influence of liberalism, Stalinism and union bureaucracies and open a path to revolutionary struggle by the working class—that is, the heart of building a revolutionary Trotskyist party—very little was said.

This is rooted in the history of the FT-CI and its opposition to the ICFI's defense of Trotskyism. It emerges from Nahuel Moreno's break with the ICFI and with Trotskyism in 1963, aiming to build "left centrist" parties in alliance with General Juan Peron's bourgeois movement in Argentina, and pro-Stalinist Pabloite revisionists in Europe. The conference was silent on the PTS' historic ties to Peronism, and RP's decades-long participation in the pro-war, Pabloite New Anticapitalist Party (NPA) in France.

The FT-CI speakers downplayed their ties to the establishment, but this cut across the clarification of how to stop fascism, genocide and war. Mass disillusionment with reactionary policies of the US Democratic Party, Argentina's Peronists, and Stalinist or Pabloite forces in France has fueled the electoral rise of Trump, Argentine President Javier Milei, and Marine Le Pen in France. Remaining silent on who gave the far right this opening, the FT-CI could give no perspective to fight its rise.

Julia Wallace from Left Voice (USA) on Trump and the Democratic Party

The first speaker at the conference was Julia Wallace, a member of the FT-CI's Left Voice (LV) section in the United States. An official of the SEIU union and the Black Lives Matter movement, she attacked both Trump and factions of the Democratic Party who have flirted with references to socialism while working to tie youth and workers to the Democratic Party. Wallace said:

[Trump] is a billionaire capitalist who inherited wealth from a family who invested in the Nazis. Trump is a misogynist, a bigot slumlord, who came to power again on bigotry, anti-science, fear ... Democrats like Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and Sanders are

attempting to co-opt the resistance. They organized the ironically named Fight Oligarchy rallies. Some tens of thousands of people attended. They even mildly criticized the Democrats for not fighting Trump enough. But both AOC and Sanders voted to give more money towards the genocide in Palestine.

She called for "a working class party that fights for socialism." The alternative, she said, is worker-owned factories in Argentina endorsed by the PTS: "I saw the power of revolutionary Trotskyism in Argentina when I visited the worker-controlled factories 15 years ago this year."

Such vague invocations of socialism do not however clarify who will realize socialism, or how. The entire history of the class struggle shows this cannot be done by voting self-proclaimed socialist officials into power in the capitalist state. It requires that the working class conquers state power based on its own political and social organisations, as the Paris Commune did in 1871 or the soviets in the October 1917 revolution in Russia.

Trotskyism defends this Marxist-internationalist revolutionary tradition not only against bourgeois forces, but against the descendants of Stalinist bureaucracies advocating "socialism in one country" who in 1991 dissolved the Soviet Union and restored capitalism. Wallace's hailing of worker-owned factories in Argentina as an example of "revolutionary Trotskyism" muddies this key issue.

Worker-operated factories in Argentina exist inside capitalist society. They are subject to the price and tariff pressures of the world capitalist market and the rule of Milei's far-right police state. Such factories may make fascists nervous, as workers can correctly conclude that capitalists are not needed to run factories. But to hold such factories up as an example of socialism or "revolutionary Trotskyism" is to falsify both socialism and Trotskyism.

While condemning Democratic politicians, Wallace repeatedly made nods to Democratic Party politics. Stressing the superior role she claimed was played by workers of her particular race, she said:

Black people are the powerhouses of the working class in the United States. From the multiracial fight for democratic rights, the civil rights movement, to the combative anti-imperialist black revolutionary tradition, we are some of the most combative sectors of the proletariat.

Again, the real questions begin where Wallace's remarks end. Will the liberation of black workers emerge from the socialist liberation of all workers, or inside institutions of the US capitalist state that work to divide the population along racial lines, doling out positions and privileges to select individuals based on racial criteria? Wallace did not say. But it is to

promote precisely this latter type of bourgeois identity politics that the Ford Foundation gave a \$100 million grant to fund Black Lives Matter.

Wallace's mixing of invocations of socialist internationalism and of black-nationalist conceptions retards the growth of socialist consciousness. Instead of arming workers and youth for an irreconcilable socialist struggle against the currently-predominating forms of politics, it promotes the disorienting view that these politics are compatible with socialism.

Sasha Yampolskaya on the NATO-Russia war in Ukraine

Sasha Yampolskaya, a Russian transsexual activist and RP member, spoke on her arrival in France in 2018 and the NATO-Russia war in Ukraine. She described why she became disillusioned with Russia: "First of all, there were the murders of LGBT people. But then, and above all, there was compulsory military service. That was before the outbreak of the war in Ukraine. But already, militarization was everywhere."

Yampolskaya criticized the indubitable hypocrisy of US-NATO war propaganda, as the European imperialist powers' claim they are fighting in Ukraine to defend freedom and democracy, while also endorsing the Israeli regime's genocide in Gaza:

[French] defense manufacturers are looking for raw materials, and Ukraine can provide them. As we seek to break Russian workers from the chauvinism of their government, it is just as urgent to understand that the self-determination of Ukraine cannot arise from the support provided as assistance by NATO. Because beyond the question of raw materials, Western imperialisms have pressed the Ukrainian government several times to lower the draft age to continue the war.

Yampolskaya's remarks however point to the limited basis of her opposition to NATO and Russian President Vladimir Putin's regime. Opposition to homophobia and the militarization of capitalist society, in Russia and internationally are, of course, legitimate and necessary. However, they alone do not provide a sufficient basis for a Trotskyist struggle against the war in Ukraine.

Such a struggle is based on irreconcilable revolutionary opposition to all the imperialist powers, and also the capitalist kleptocracies created by the Stalinist dissolution of the USSR. Neither Putin's regime in Russia, nor NATO-backed regimes in Ukraine or other ex-Soviet republics have any progressive role to play. They are organically reactionary, chauvinist and rooted in Stalinist bureaucracies' usurping of power from the working class in the Soviet Union.

As the imperialist powers try to plunder Eurasia, playing on conflicts between former Soviet republics like Russia and Ukraine, the only viable strategy is to transfer power back to the working class in an international revolutionary struggle across the former Soviet Union and Europe.

Notwithstanding Yampolskaya's criticisms of NATO, RP cannot be called an anti-imperialist party. From 2009 to 2022, it worked inside the French NPA, which supported not only NATO-backed Islamist militias in Syria, but the far-right forces that in 2014 led a NATO-backed putsch in Ukraine, setting the stage for the current war. While RP left the NPA in 2022, it remains deeply embedded in relations with pro-war union bureaucracies and parties in France.

Elsa Marcel on the Gaza genocide

Elsa Marcel spoke on the widespread outrage felt by broad layers of workers and youth internationally against the Gaza genocide. A lawyer, Marcel is defending RP spokesman Anasse Kazib against reactionary and false charges brought by French police that Kazib is complicit with terrorism due to his statements defending Palestinians in Gaza.

Gaza, she noted, "is probably the first genocide in history during which the victims broadcast live as they are massacred. ... [W]e are among those who will never forget that [Europe's] governments are complicit in this massacre and that History will judge them." She called for "a massive collective response is indispensable not only for Palestine, but also more broadly to avoid catastrophe."

What Marcel did not address is how to build a "massive collective response" and what form it would take. There have been for two years mass protests internationally and calls among port and logistics workers for international strike action to halt the shipping of US and European weapons to Israel.

If a mass movement capable of halting the genocide has not emerged, this was due not to a lack of outrage, but to the bankruptcy of the bourgeois, Stalinist and Pabloite parties. In the imperialist centers, they called for pressure on their own imperialist governments and union bureaucracies to take action. This came to nought: predictably, the imperialist governments backed the genocide, and the union bureaucracies blocked broader strike action.

The FT-CI's policy in France exemplified its inability to mount politically-principled opposition to the Gaza genocide. RP called for a "critical vote" for the New Popular Front (NPF) formed last year by Jean-Luc Mélenchon, which included explicitly pro-Zionist parties like the bourgeois Socialist Party (PS). The basis of the NPF, Mélenchon said, was to "throw into the river" his differences with the PS and its allies over the Gaza genocide. Calling for a "critical vote" for such an alliance is to abandon principled opposition to the genocide altogether.

Stopping the Gaza genocide requires building against it an international mobilization of rank-and-file workers, independent of the union bureaucracies. In the Middle East, this opens the path to the revolutionary overturn of the unviable and reactionary nation-state system—whose bankruptcy is exemplified by the Israeli genocide—and the building of the United Socialist States of the Middle East. The basis of such a struggle is the irreconcilable Trotskyist opposition to Stalinism and bourgeois nationalism that the FT-CI and RP reject.

Myriam Bregman of the PTS: the Morenoite alliance with Peronism

Next, lawyer Myriam Bregman of the Argentine PTS discussed Milei's repressive regime. Bregman alone of the speakers tried to address how it is possible for the bourgeoisie to bring forward far-right governments.

Admitting that the Peronists demobilized and demoralized the workers, she said:

[Peronism] refuses to confront the far right in the only place it can be defeated. And this is also very serious, and from this also we must draw lessons, since Peronism is not just the main bourgeois opposition party. It also leads the CGT [i.e. General Confederation of Labor union], which has done nothing, absolutely nothing all this time so that workers could defend themselves against the government of Javier Milei.

On paper, Bregman rejected calls for unity with the Peronists against Milei and the far right:

Who don't we all get together to fight the far right? ... In Argentina that already happened, everyone got together against Macri's right-wing government. Trade union, feminist leaders, governors of the Peronist right, together with those claiming to be the Peronist left, they united with the progressives, and, do you know what happened? They went into government, pursued policies that embittered the people because they carried out structural adjustment and austerity policies of the International Monetary Fund, and Milei won.

But this only raises the question: What was the role of the PTS in this political shipwreck? It served as a loyal critic of the Peronists, marching alongside them in social protests, presenting itself as the 'radical' faction of a Peronist-led movement. Their mouthing of a few phrases about a general strike, which neither the CGT nor the PTS sought to prepare, did not disturb their relations with the Peronists. In the end, Bregman's criticisms of Peronism also expose the PTS itself.

Anasse Kazib and the politics of the French union bureaucracy

The final speaker was RP spokesman Anasse Kazib, an official of the Pabloite Solidarity-Unity-Democracy (SUD) union's rail federation. He said, 'I'm a railworker in the triage center at Le Bourget. Every day, trains pass through that are transporting merchandise produced by proletarians in the four corners of the world. They and we make the world go round, and we must struggle together.' He called for opposition to nationalism, invoking the title of German Marxist Karl Liebknecht's famous anti-war article of 1915, 'The Main Enemy is at Home!'

Kazib hailed delegations of French CGT union officials at the conference. He said the difference between lower-ranking and higher-ranking union officials is that the former defend workers' interests, while the latter defend French interests, together with the French state and business federations. Pointing to assembled CGT officials, Kazib enthused:

That is the trade union bureaucracy! It is valuable militants, who get their hands dirty on the ground every day to get better wages and working conditions. But trade union organizations, it's also people at the top who use their position, who use these hours [that union militants] get their hands dirty on the ground, use this relationship of forces to try to position themselves as protectors of French interests.

What is the meaning of this, if one tries to translate it from the language of Kazib's starry-eyed adoration of the bureaucracy into the language of Marxism?

The bureaucracy recruits layers of workers with illusions in the unions and subordinates them to imperialist policy worked out at meetings of French state officials, business federations and union tops. The lower rungs of the bureaucracy are, of course, permanently dissatisfied with the upper rungs' sell-outs of strikes, which discredit them with other workers. Kazib and other union officials inside RP are, indeed, some of France's more

prominent dissatisfied bureaucrats.

This dissatisfaction has however no progressive content: it only encourages the old illusions that the rise of a few individual bureaucrats inside the bureaucracy will shift its policies. These illusions are, however, invariably disappointed.

Bluntly put, RP is setting a trap for the workers. Recognizing in words the bankruptcy of the union leadership, it refuses to call for the independent organization of the rank-and-file. Recognizing in words internationalism and the globalization of economic production, it proposes that class struggle be controlled by national bureaucracies. It rejects the International Workers Alliance of Rank-and-File Committees, instead calling on French union officials to build a "Network for a General Strike."

Kazib concluded by calling conference attendees to join RP, to bring RP from 500 to 1,000 members: "If tomorrow we said ... that Révolution permanente has doubled in size and has even more youth and workers in its ranks ready to fight to change the destiny of humanity, I think we would really start making the bourgeoisie flip out."

How do political leaders of the French bourgeoisie see RP? While they indubitably fear explosive social anger in the population, they will not "flip out" just at the sight of RP.

They have decades of experience in using middle class renegades from Trotskyism as tools of bourgeois politics. They used not only the pro-war NPA, but also Pierre Lambert's Organization communiste internationaliste (OCI), which broke with the ICFI in 1971 to orient to the big-business PS. Former OCI members include ex-PS Prime Minister Lionel Jospin and Mélenchon, whose populist France Unbowed (LFI) party leads the NFP alliance with the PS, the PCF and the NPA.

RP's role in the main political struggles in France since it left the NPA indicates that, in the final analysis, it is being groomed for a similar role.

During the 2023 pension struggle, as millions struck and riots erupted against Macron's imposition of overwhelmingly unpopular cuts without even a vote in parliament, RP said that the situation was "not revolutionary." Two-thirds of the French people supported a general strike to bring down Macron and his cuts. Yet RP said that encouraging workers "to make experiences with bourgeois representative democracy" was "the only viable democratic perspective."

Rejecting the PES' call to bring down Macron, it claimed democracy would emerge not from working class struggle for socialism, but under a bourgeois regime that rules against the people. RP also appealed to the union leaderships to provide a "battle plan" against Macron. It thus adapted to the union bureaucracies who shut down strikes after Macron declared his cuts were law.

During the 2024 general elections, RP called for a "critical vote" for NFP candidates—even as the NFP endorsed Macron's candidates. Macron trampled upon the election results, denying the NFP the right to form a government and instead naming his own right-wing government. RP had not served as a revolutionary opposition to Mélenchon, the PS, and their defense of Macron, but as a political satellite of the NFP, guarding its left flank.

Declarations of internationalism and opposition to genocide and fascism at RP's Paris conference do not constitute a left-wing break with let alone a Trotskyist repudiation of this record. Evading the key issues, they give the FT-CI's sections a political facelift while letting them continue on their bureaucratic path. They are not revolutionary Trotskyist parties, but obstacles to the struggle waged by the ICFI to build such parties in the working class.



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