

Bamako - two forums collide

Thu, 09/02/2006 - 23:00

The first of the polycentric WSFs took place in Bamako, capital of Mali, from 19th to 23rd January. Estimates vary at between ten and twenty thousand attending.

Reports, in the French weekly Rouge, suggest there was a sharp contrast between the stars of the ?international social movements? - the academics, NGO fulltimers, and politicians, both Malian and French - and the representatives of the often semi-clandestine trade unions, peasant organisations, youth and women?s movements, and ethnic minority rights groups.

Prominent amongst these latter were miners and their wives from Morilla gold mines in Mali, forced to live clandestinely, the Union of Democratic African Youth, the cotton producers of CMDT (Malian Textile Development Company), railworkers and members of Cocardirail (Citizens? Collective for the Restitution and the Integrated Development of Malian Railways).

Present too were militant Malian sans-papiers, recently expelled from France. By a happy irony they were able to confront both a Malian minister and a representative of Jacques Chirac, both the guests of honour of the official Forum organisers. This is yet another example of the hypocrisy of the ban on political parties.

At a session on ?African youth faced with imperialism", militants from the Jeunesse Communiste Revolutionnaire (JCR, a youth organisation, politically linked to the LCR, French section of the Fourth International) made an excellent proposal: a joint campaign in France and Africa to close down French bases there. This is an important demand, as French imperialism acts as the main world policeman of the region.

In fact, at the Athens ESF, youth across Europe should take up the issue of all imperialist bases and ?peacekeeping? missions, British, Belgian, etc. demanding that all imperialist troops get out of Africa. To this we should add the defence of African asylum seekers, repeatedly deported from states of the EU, or denied the right to stay, citizenship and human rights when they are there.

Building strong bonds of common struggle with trade unionists and youth organisations in Africa is a vital part of creating a force, which can fight capitalism and imperialism. The Nairobi World Social Forum in 2007 will be an enormous opportunity to take this process forward several giant steps.

It has to be prepared over the next year. It is the real alternative to the patronising charity mongering of the Make Poverty History sort. What we need are links with the workers and youth of Africa, who are already fighting back. They can teach youth and workers in Europe and the world just as much about lessons of struggle as they can learn. We must build links with unions, peasants and shantytown organisations before Nairobi, to make this meeting as fruitful and possible.