

Crisis of leadership in the European left

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The European anti-neoliberal left, which formed at the European Social Forum in November 2002, has, over the past year, entered into a real crisis. The reasons for this lie in the political trajectory of its major component - the parties which compose the European Left Party (ELP), the former or reformed Communist Parties.

Rifondazione Comunista (RC) in Italy was at the centre of the Florence ESF (2002), the Parti Communiste Francaise (PCF) at the Paris Social Forum (2003), Synaspismos at the Athens Social Forum (2006) and the Party of Democratic Socialism-Left Party (PDS-LP) will be central to the anti-G8 protests at Rostock in Germany in June.

Italy

The degree to which the wheel of the ELP's sections has come full circle can be seen in the case of Rifondazione. At Florence in 2002, its leader, Fausto Bertinotti, drew thunderous applause when he criticised himself for having supported the Olive Tree Coalition government of Romano Prodi in 1996-98. Prodi went on to design the Lisbon agenda, the series of neoliberal reforms adopted by the European Union in 2000.

"Never again!?" cried Bertinotti. RC representatives attended all the international meetings of the ESF, advocating an anti-neoliberal alternative to Lisbon.

So when Rifondazione entered another neoliberal Romano Prodi government a year ago, the Italian No Global and antiwar movements went into decline. Prodi has survived two major crises over the occupation of Afghanistan and the expansion of the huge American airbase at Vicenza. He survived both, thanks to Rifondazione support in votes of confidence.

Indeed, he extracted a promise from RC's parliamentarians not to vote against the government again. Fearful of the return of the corrupt Silvio Berlusconi even Rifondazione's left wing - including Franco Turigliatto, a member of the Fourth International - did not dare to reject his blackmail.

Rifondazione and the Democrats of the Left have ceased mobilising on the streets, supported sending Italian troops to Lebanon and tolerated their supposed humanitarian role in Afghanistan. Only 30,000 answered the call of the ESF to demonstrate against the war in March.

France, Germany and Britain

In France in the second half of 2006, the powerful No of the Left bloc, which mobilised to reject the neoliberal European Constitution in the referendum in May 2005, shattered over the issue of the 2007 presidential elections. The uprising of the oppressed youth in the suburbs - banlieues - that November and the mass revolt against anti-youth employment laws - the CPE - the following spring weakened the government.

Yet, when it came to the elections, the attempt to mount a 'unity' candidate shattered. The PCF refused to renounce participation in a neoliberal Socialist Party government. The pathetic 1.5 per cent vote for its candidate, Marie-Georges Buffet, was fair punishment.

In Germany too, the movement to create a new working class party was shipwrecked by the WASG (Labour and Social Justice - The Electoral Alternative). Rather than representing the militant resistance to Agenda 2010 and Hartz IV (Germany's implementation of the Lisbon agenda), they fused with the PDS-LP, already in coalition with the Social Democrats (SPD) in Berlin and Mecklenburg-Vorpommern and carrying out cuts and privatisations. The Socialist Workers Party's sister organisation, Linksrueck, support this line.

As in France and Italy, the lure of office, even at the cost of signing up to neoliberal reforms, exposes these parties' 'anti-neoliberalism' as a fraud.

The European Anticapitalist Left - a supposed far left alternative to the ELP - has also failed to rise to the challenges of leadership. Its parties too have been seduced into seeing the question primarily electoral terms (see page 10, for example). In Britain both Respect and the leadership of the railworkers' union, RMT, have in different ways aborted the moves to create a new working class party.

The former have created a cross-class bloc with Islamists and Muslim businessmen in the chase for parliamentary and council seats. The latter, despite hosting a promising conference to discuss political representation to the left of Labour, has relied on left Labour, Welsh Nationalist and Scottish Socialist representatives. Add to this the self-destruction of the Scottish Socialist Party and it is clear that in Britain the wishes of vanguard fighters to build an alternative to Labour have been badly let down by these 'leaders'.

Consistent anti-capitalism

All in all, this represents a criminal frittering away of the enormous 2003-06 upsurge in anti-neoliberal and anti-war struggles. The ELP is totally unfit to lead the anticapitalist movement; the European Anticapitalist Left offers no alternative to it.

Yet there are repeated signs that mass resistance to imperialist war and neoliberalism has not disappeared. Time and again it is regenerated by the bosses' attacks, by the threat of new wars, by EU and government legislation.

The 1.5 million votes for Olivier Besancenot of the LCR shows that militants preferred him to the PCF, Lutte Ouvriere or Attac, which were marginal to these fights. In Spain, this March, 400,000 demonstrated against war.

In Greece there have been large-scale, sustained and militant student demonstrations against the educational 'reform'. In Austria, in January youth and trade unionists protested against the social democrats' sell-out of its own election programme in order to enter a coalition with the right.

The regular setbacks in Europe, their failure to result in new organisations are a direct result of the crisis of leadership, in particular the left reformist and post Stalinist parties centred on the European Left Party.

The 'far left' forces regularly demonstrate their unwillingness and inability to present a principled opposition or practical alternative to them. The urgent task of revolutionaries is to combat reformism and centrism and fight for political and organisational forms for consistent anticapitalism: revolutionary communism.

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