Eighth congress of the League for the Fifth International a great success

League for the Fifth International Sat, 10/07/2010 - 14:41
League for the Fifth International

Delegates from the sections of the League for the Fifth international gathered in Turkey in June to discuss the international work of our organisation and adopt the documents and resolutions that will guide our work over the coming years.

Documents passed at the congress

An historic crisis of the system as a whole? on the meaning of our analysis

This was the eighth Congress the League has held since it became a democratic centralist organisation in summer 1989. Members of the league from Germany, Austria, the Czech Republic, Sweden and Britain attended. Congress was also pleased to welcome a delegate from the new US section of the League, established in 2009 and a supporter of the League from Nepal who is a member of the socialist youth group Revolution. Congress devoted special time to a discussion of developments in South Asia and the ongoing crisis in Nepal in particular. Congress confirmed its commitment to helping to build a section of the League in Nepal and establishing a genuine revolutionary socialist alternative to the Maoists, who have so far promised much and yet delivered so little for the Nepalese peasants and workers.

The debate on Nepal focussed on the failure of the two stages Maoist strategy in Nepal of first democracy then socialism. In opposition to the Maoists, revolutionary socialists argue for the strategy of permanent revolution, that democracy can only really be won by achieving socialism. There was also a discussion on the recent Bandh in May 2010?widely described as a general strike but which in reality was a wave of coercive actions by rural Maoist cadre bussed into Kathmandu to prevent workers from working and to close down businesses and not a voluntary working class action. This rapidly became so unpopular that it was called off after a few days in the face of a backlash from the working class and left wing intelligentsia in the capital.

Unfortunately due to visa refusals the delegates from Pakistan were unable to attend. Congress unreservedly condemned immigration laws, which so infringe the rights of ordinary people from third world countries to travel abroad. In addition the delegates from Sri Lanka were unable to attend due to critical political developments at home. Both sections sent greetings to the congress, and promising section reports were sent which showed the gains that had been made by comrades in both countries. The work of the Socialist party of Sri Lanka was reported as being a real success, with the first issue of Revolution published in Sinhala and successful meetings on international women?s day, as well as standing candidates in the recent elections as part of the Left Front platform.
When the Sri Lankan comrades first came into contact with the League as a split from the CWI in 2006 the situation in their country was very different, locked as it still was in a civil war. The SPSL has had to deal with the new post war situation and the struggle for democratic and workers rights that it has opened up. Our section was able to send health workers to the mass internment camps in the north of the country and organise both active solidarity work as well as political discussions with the Tamil refugees. During the civil war the SPSL stood firm in defence of Tamil self-determination and national rights, using their influence in the trade union movement to win working class support against chauvinism.

The Pakistan section of the League was born out of the popular movement that overthrew the dictator Musharraf, spearheaded by the radical lawyers, which ended nearly a decade of military rule. Recently the League members have been campaigning against the war in the Northwest frontier province, adopting a clear anti-imperialist standpoint of calling for the war to end, unlike much of the Pakistani left who support the soldiers against the villagers and resistance fighters.

Congress also welcomed delegates from Revolution, the socialist youth organisation, who participated in the discussions and voted on the documents. The League reconfirmed its commitment to working alongside Revolution internationally to build a youth organisation that could bring more young people into the struggle against capitalism and imperialism.

The main business of Congress was the adoption of the perspectives and tasks documents as well as the amendment of a new programmatic manifesto as an action programme against the crisis. The programmatic manifesto was amended by congress, including some important debates on defending the right for immigrants to use their own languages in schools and so on, as a rejection of the idea of official state languages. There was also a debate on the slogan of "abolishing the stock market" which was rejected by congress, instead calling for the nationalisation of banks and financial institutions.

Congress also adopted a resolution on the character of China. This resolution analysed the development of China in the last decade, including the exponential growth of its economy and its increasing power in the international world order. The congress came to the conclusion that China was now an imperialist state, the development of which was now one of the most important factors in world politics.

Importantly the growing workers movement in China points to the coming revolutionary struggles which will determine the future not only of China but indeed the world in the coming decades. The emergence of a new imperialist power, especially one with as much economic and military potential as China heralds the beginning of a new world order of multi-polarity and increasing frictions with the established "older" imperialist nations, most crucially the USA.

The German section of the League submitted a resolution on the question of what kind of government should socialists fight for. This was in response to some delegates who had proposed including in the new programme a reference to workers, peasants and poor peoples governments, as a way of including the mass semi proletarian layers living in the vast shanty towns across the world. The resolution rejected this proposal and argued instead to keep the position on the workers and peasants government, which is the position which congress accepted.

Congress also discussed draft resolutions on Maoism and Islamism, which are intended to guide the work of our members and supporters in South Asia. Longer discussions by the delegates present provided more information and ideas for the resolutions which we aim to publish soon.

The last congress of the League was held in 2006, during a difficult time for our organisation. Splits in the Austrian and British sections as well as the loss of many members from the German Revolution group all
happened in that year, the result of various members entering into a period of retreat or disputes over tactical questions. The congress then was marked by the attitude of all comrades present to go forward with renewed energy and determination, and the results of which have begun to bear fruit. Since that time the League has tripled the number of its members and sections and increased the number of its supporters in several other countries. We are also engaged in discussions with groups in Asia, Africa and Latin America.

The document dealing with the tasks of the League in the coming years emphasised the importance not only of growth but also consolidation of the newer sections. It discussed how to ensure the fuller participation of the Asian sections, despite the repeated problems we have faced with getting visas for comrades to attend our international meetings. Given our perspective that the years ahead will be marked by intensified levels of class struggle we set as our priorities greater integration into the trade unions and workplaces, greater involvement in solidarity actions with major strikes, greater recruitment of workers, including women and those from the migrant communities. We elected a number of new comrades to our international leading bodies with the intention of providing more advice and support for our sections and quick responses to the many enquiries we now receive from around the world.

After congress we held a cadre school for delegates and comrades attending the European Social Forum which focussed on the stages of building of a revolutionary party, with workshops on Minneapolis 1934 and France 1934-35. A conference of women members of the League and Revolution discussed the work that we will be doing in the next four years to draw more women into our ranks. This included the experience of building a revolutionary women's collective in Austria, the production of a new pamphlet on socialism and women's liberation in the UK and work amongst women trade unionists. Congress and the conference renewed its pledge to ensure that the proportion of women members of Revolution and the League continues to grow.

A new age of crises, resistance and revolution has opened

Congress also debated our position on the characterisation we should give to the political period that opened with the crisis in 2008. Some comrades argued that we should designate this ?a revolutionary period?, rather as the League had designated the post-2001 period as a ?pre-revolutionary period,? marked by the tendency to stagnation of the productive forces. The supporters of this position stressed the objective factors at work in the world economy as proof of this tendency towards decline and consequently the development of pre-revolutionary and revolutionary situations. Congress debated these issues and decided to revise these characterisations ? arguing that they represented too abstract generalisation which downplayed the crucial subjective factor for characterising a period as ?revolutionary? or ?pre revolutionary.?

In addition the majority thought that such characterisations when applied to longer periods ran the danger of obscuring the changing situations and conjunctures ? where the changes in the balance of class forces as a result of victories and defeats for the working class ? play a crucial role and, indeed dictate changes of tactics. Such situations and conjunctures can indeed be characterised as ?non-?, ?pre-? or ?counter-? revolutionary as a result of in a concrete combination of objective and subjective factors. Congress also clarified that whilst the post-1989 period ? widely designated as that of Globalisation and of unchallenged US hegemony - had ended, the relations of power, the predominant global institutions and their ideology had not totally collapsed but nevertheless had entered into mortal crisis.

Nevertheless the congress as a whole was of the opinion that we had entered a period (necessarily of unknown duration) marked by the emergence what Trotsky called in the 1920s and 30s ?the revolutionary crisis of the system as a whole? to distinguish it from normal cyclical crises or catastrophic slumps.
Congress thus unanimously passed a perspectives document which reflected the characterisation of the world as being in a revolutionary historic crisis of capitalism, one where revolutionary communism can once again become a mass phenomenon. But we also fully took into account the crisis of proletarian leadership, evidences in the tremendous unevenness of working class response to the crisis. The concluding section of the International Perspectives adopted by congress sums up the conclusions drawn by congress about the struggles in the years ahead and the tasks facing revolutionaries. We will quote it in full.

The League for the Fifth International has successfully analysed the development of the present crisis from its first appearance as a credit crunch in 2007-2008 to the present uneven and halting cyclical recovery in the imperialist heartlands. We showed that all the elements of stabilisation and credit-fuelled expansion associated with Globalisation had reached their limit, indeed had turned into their opposites—becoming causes of systemic breakdown. We believe that economic crisis of 2008 has opened up not simply a particularly severe cyclical recession but opened what Leon Trotsky called “a revolutionary crisis of the system as a whole.” i.e. an extended period encompassing several industrial cycles in which the overall trend is towards the stagnation and decay of the productive forces.

This does not mean that within such a revolutionary crisis there cannot be shorter periods of expansion, recovery, indeed growth of the productive forces globally; but it does mean that that such periods will be short-lived and will not be the predominant feature in the longer term. Nor does it mean that particular sectors of the world economy will not experience significant growth, just as the USA did for most of the 1920s. Clearly today China plays such a role, though it is far from immune from its own crash.

Moreover even in such a period the laws of uneven and combined development operate with the situation in every country conditioned by the trend to breakdown but with the situations of individual countries (and also continental, regional ones) showing particular features. even ones contradictory to the general character. Another vital point is that we are at the very beginning, not at the end, of such a period of revolutionary crisis. Therefore we can expect to see recoveries and stabilisations as well as crises and slumps and - necessarily? phases of transition between one and the other.

The ecological crisis is an integral part of the this historic crisis, revealing the physical limits of capitalist development, the inability of the profit system to tolerate the scale of adaptation needed to ameliorate the crisis, as well as the self-serving priorities of the ruling cliques. The Copenhagen climate summit and the BP Oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico show this linking the economic interests of Big Oil with the USA’s need for strategic control of reserves and its recourse to ever more environmentally destructive extraction (deep sea drilling), weakening of the trade unions whose control alone could ensure safety.

It is obvious that such a new period of revolutionary crisis creates growing tensions between states, as the USA’s post 1990 unchallenged hegemony ends. A new period of the division and redivision of the world between the great powers, old and new, is developing apace. Its focal points are the Middle East and Central Asia (Palestine, Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan). The Zionist rogue state has an will again attempt to break up the gathering forces resisting its ethnic cleansing and collective punishments of pressure of the Palestinians But attempts by the USA to regain its hegemony in Latin America will also cause explosions—pre revolutionary and revolutionary situations. Tension between the old imperialist powers and the China will increase instability and the possibility of proxy conflicts in Africa, Asia and Latin America as the dynamic new power seeks markets, raw materials and strategic allies.

In Europe the capitalist class threatens huge attacks on the working class, attempting to dismantle large parts of the welfare state and claw back many of the gains that the working class won after the second world war. In Eastern Europe a new age of austerity threatens and even greater decline in the living
standards of many people, already further impoverished since 1991.

The revolutionary nature of this systemic crisis tells us that if the working class is to avoid a qualitative worsening of its living conditions, the destruction of its social and democratic gains within capitalism, the barbarism of mass unemployment, racism, fascism, environmental degradation and war, then it must not only resist each and every one of them in the here and now but it must consciously refocus the goal of struggle which most of its mass organisations - trade unions and political parties - have worked with since the collapse of the Communist International (1933) and the ultimate failure of the Fourth International to build a mass revolutionary leadership in the years during and after the Second World War (1948-51). The replacement of capitalism by socialism by means of national and international revolution must once again become the conscious objective of the organised working class movements worldwide.

Resistance to the economic, social and ecological crisis is breaking out everywhere, from workers, peasants, the poor and oppressed peoples and youth, who are disgusted by the bankers and politicians and are impelled into action to defend their own living conditions. But in most countries over the past two decades the trade unions and workplace organisations of the workers have declined in size, democratic vitality and militancy, compared with the 1970s and 1980s.

In the United States, Britain and many countries the restriction of the unions largely to a labour aristocracy or to Public sector workers is a weakness that must be fought and overcome. The neglect by the big unions of organising and fighting for casual, insecure, migrant, women and young workers and failure to organise and fight for the unemployed is a fatal weakness for which the unions will pay with further defeats unless this is remedied.

Nevertheless there are powerful positive counter-tendencies often led by smaller new unions or rank and file committees and co-ordinations in Latin America (Argentina, Brazil, Venezuela etc.) and now in China too. In Europe (France, Italy, Greece) the smaller unions often play a more dynamic role. But the main political organisations of the masses - nationalists, liberals, populists, social-democrats, ?Communists? and Maoists ? often block these struggles outright or mislead them, failing to direct resistance towards the overthrow of the capitalist system.

Reactionary forces too muster, looking towards the enraged petit-bourgeoisie, the non-class conscious workers and the lumpenproletariat to forge new movements based on racism, religious fanaticism and irredentism in the service of capital and order.

The present crisis highlights all that is inadequate, rotten, inconsistent and obsolete in the policy and practice of the leadership of the mass workers organisations, both trade unions and political parties. It creates a powerful objective basis for efforts to challenge and replace them with a new revolutionary leadership. Victory in the immediate struggles against the attempts to unload the effects of the crisis onto the backs of the workers, peasant and urban poor require the creation of democratic mass organisation of struggle than can start to resolve this crisis of leadership. In the longer term the very future of human civilisation depends on resolving this crisis of working class leadership. For this purpose a Fifth - working class - International and new revolutionary parties in every country are needed.

In the coming period our key slogans will be;

? Make the capitalists, bankers and the rich landowners pay the costs of their crisis.
? No to all austerity and cuts and instead fight for a programme of public works (building equipping and staffing hospitals, houses, schools, combating environmental degradation)
? Block all attempts to resolve the crisis at the expense of the exploited by mass strikes, workplace and land occupations - organised by democratic councils of workers and peasants.
In many countries the necessity of all out and indefinite general strikes will be posed which in turn raises the need for a revolutionary works and peasants government based on their organs of struggle.

Solidarity with the national liberation struggles of the Palestinians, the Kurds, the Tamils, the Tibetans, the Basques and defence of the Roma and Muslim minorities in Europe

For continental and worldwide mobilisations in solidarity with those under immediately under attack

Against all imperialist wars - the strictest revolutionary defeatism in the imperialist heartlands-unconditional defence of non-imperialist countries under attack and of resistance movements by occupied or attacked peoples.

The sections of the League for the Fifth International, like virtually all those laying claim to continuity with Lenin and Trotsky, are still unfortunately propaganda organisations not parties. We are organisations trying to lay the foundations of new revolutionary parties in our different countries but also and above all to found a new International. For this reason they have to combine the task of developing and fighting for the programmes needed for this task with involvement in as many fronts of the class struggle as possible. This requires fighting within the mass organisations and under the existing leaderships wherever they take action - but at the same time fighting to create mass rank and file forces able to control and, indeed, replace them.

Finally the slogan of the Fifth International itself has been recently popularised by President Hugo Chavez in Venezuela. This has led many socialist groups and intellectuals, including the Fourth International - to declare themselves in favour of a Fifth International, a call that was raised by the League as far back as 2003. At the same time, the fact that the slogan was raised by a populist President of a bourgeois state spurred other Trotskyists to reject the slogan and, it seems, confirmed them in their lack of any active attempt to place the task of building a new International on the order of the day for the mass organisations of the working class. We are firmly convinced that this is exactly where it belongs rather than remaining a platonic call for propaganda groups to 'rebuild the Fourth International.' Revolutionary unity between such groups on a principled programmatic foundation is both necessary and is our goal but it must be combined with intervention into every forum where internationalist minded class militants gather.

Although the League for the Fifth International is critical of Chavez and is against the kind of Fifth International that he wants to build, were he to call a conference, truly open to working class organisations actively fighting imperialism and capitalism then this would offer an opportunity to raise the programme of socialist revolution. The League is determined to take every such opportunity in the coming years.

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