

European Social Forum: A crisis of direction

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The EPA takes place in the midst of an important period of sharpening class struggle. The forces of resistance to the coalition waging the 'war on terror' have inflicted significant defeats on it. The effectiveness of resistance in Lebanon forced withdrawal of the Israeli invaders, the occupation in Iraq has entered its final stage where withdrawal is being openly debated and the Afghan occupation has become a major war.

The ESF in Athens ended with a huge and militant mobilisation on the streets of the city. It saw the emergence of a left, anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist wing which was much more vibrant and militant than the previous two forums, in London and Paris.

But despite this, the ESF failed once again to set up an international co-ordination, which could unify the struggles against the imperialist and capitalist offensive. It failed in a situation, where not only the imperialist offensive is likely to become more brutal, aggressive and barbaric in order to resolve its difficulties but also where the chances for a successful, victorious fight back on a global scale are increasing.

So why has the ESF failed to create a fighting body, a trans-European co-ordination, to bring together the struggles and encourage the setting up organs of struggle locally and nationally - throughout Europe? Why has it failed to make itself into a consciously anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist assembly?

The answer is straightforward. It was blocked by the informal and unaccountable leadership of the 'process'. This leadership is made up of thinly disguised representatives of the European Left Parties and members of the Fourth International, the International Socialist Tendency and other far-left groups.

Since the Italian elections Rifondazione Comunista has entered a bourgeois government - a government headed by Romano Prodi - one of the central architects of the Lisbon Agenda and the whole project of building a strengthened European imperialist super state. Hence the sending of Italian troops to Lebanon and their continued presence in Afghanistan with the full and enthusiastic support of Rifondazione Comunista.

The most important sections of the European Left Party like the PDS in Germany and the PCF in France are exercising or seeking office on the same basis - i.e. a coalition with the 'social liberal' parties and we would add social imperialist parties, like the SPD (Germany), DS (Italy), SP (France), to take forward the European super state project.

The ESF has been a space where people deliver fiery speeches against the Lisbon Agenda but where the major parties and trade unions go home to resume their work of getting into governments implementing the neoliberal reforms. It can survive this crying contradiction between its words and its deeds only if effective criticism of them is smothered and above all if no action against the Lisbon reforms is planned or coordinated by the ESF. It is no accident that the enthusiasm for an annual ESF and regular EPAs has

visibly waned since the London ESF.

That is why these parties consciously and deliberately want to prevent the ESF becoming a fighting body, which could fight their 'reform' policies, their support for imperialist intervention and occupation if only it can be given a United Nations fig leaf. Allied to the reformist apparatuses of the European Left are the bureaucracy's of the European Trade Unions and NGOs like ATTAC, who want to rescue the existing capitalist system via reforms, rather than fight it to overthrow it.

But the bureaucrats and petit-bourgeois NGOs could not have succeeded so easily, if they were not backed by important sectors for the 'radical' left - like the USFI so-called 'Trotskyist' USFI (LCR in France) and the IST (SWP in Britain). Rather than challenging the reformist and petit-bourgeois leaderships, they make excuses for it.

Of course they recognize the crisis of the ESF - who could deny it? But what do they propose to resolve this? The SWP thinks that the ESF was 'too ambitious', set itself targets that were too big. No, it was not ambitious enough. The ESF either has to become relevant to the struggles of ordinary people, to become an organising and networking centre for activists across the continent or stay as it is, organising occasional days of action but failing to connect them to the unions and mass organisations.

The Fourth International hoped that they could 'regroup' with the left reformists, who could be cajoled into an electoral block (the European Anticapitalist Left) with diplomatic phrases, plus their services as grassroots organisers and campaigners. This block, they believed, would win substantial numbers of seats in the European and national parliaments. Alas the ELP sections wanted the spoils of office not the duties of opposition. Now the Fourth International's hopes lie in ruins - even in France. The left reformists of the RC have entered a bourgeois government, continuing the occupation and butchering of the Iraqi and Afghan people, disarming Hezbollah and pressing on with a neo-liberal cuts budget against the working class at home. The PCF will do exactly the same, if it can form a government with the Socialist Party.

We hold out no hopes most of the existing leaders of the ESF will change their course. We call on the rank and file militants in the parties and unions, already opposed to their leaders policies, to unite their forces and fight their way out of the blind alley that the ESF is in.

But this means that those organisations who want to win the thousands who have been attending the ESFs, the working class militants and youth of the trade unions and the reformist parties too, must demand that the ESF changes its structure and its objectives NOW and at the same time that they start their own anti-imperialist and anti-capitalist initiatives to co-ordinate resistance.

We think the emergence of the Anti-imperialist Space and Assembly at Athens ESF was a step towards this. The question is, will the forces that launched it, continue to take such steps? We believe that it is these forces and other left organization, political parties or trade unions like COBAS, who have already mobilised against the Prodi-government, have to unite on a the basis of joint initiatives and mobilisations against imperialism, racism and capitalism.

For this, we propose the setting up of a joint initiative on the following basis:

- ? Against imperialist war, occupation, boycotts and blockades against the countries of the so-called 'Third World'. Immediate withdrawal of all imperialist troops and their allies. For coordinated action by the working class and youth - strikes, blockades, general strikes - and active support for the resistance.
- ? No to European Imperialism. No to fortress Europe. For the right of self-determination - including independent statehood- for all peoples in Europe. For full citizens rights for all who live in Europe. Down the European Military Union. Not a Euro, not a person for the EU-army. Down with the security laws of the

EU. Scrap the 'terrorist' list of the EU!

? No to the European neoliberal offensive on the working class. For co-ordinated action against the implementation of the Lisbon agenda. For a European wide campaign and working class action to raise workers rights to the highest standard ensure a 35-hour week throughout the continent. For co-ordinated strike action against closures and neo-liberal attacks by the EU and the bosses.

In order create this united struggle, the EPA has to take the initiative to bring together a co-ordination of the already existing struggles and initiatives. It has to invite them for a European assembly early in 2007 and make this a central focus of the counter summit in Rostock against the G8.

These are the primary tasks.

But obviously the EPA and the ESF have to go beyond this if they want to have a future. They have to address what we fight for. Another European reformism, which will end up in another neo-liberal government or another round of rotten compromises with the bosses? Or for a United Socialist States of Europe, fighting for the over-throw of the capitalist and imperialist system via world revolution?

We propose that the EPA mobilises on a European level against the G8 in Rostock in June 2007. We propose it does so in order to get the largest and most militant action possible against the summit with the aim of shutting it down.

We also need to campaign to incorporate the thousands upon thousands mobilised into the work of the ESF to turn it into a fighting body and to win them to a perspectives well beyond the reformist policies of the ELP, the trade union leaderships and NGOs like ATTAC ? for a world wide movement fighting for the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism and imperialism, for a new international of the workers and youth - a Fifth International.

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