

The Stakes of the 37th Congress of the FTM-CGT

INTERNATIONALISM

Our international affiliations and their direct effects on our trade unionism

More than ever the world is cut into two: on the one side, a minute minority whose fortune is ever more considerable, on the other, the huge majority of the planet who is ever more impoverished and dominated. More than ever globalization is synonymous with deepening of the domination of a class crushing the peoples of the whole world.

The intervention of the CGT on the international questions is necessary for our activity in France but also in order to attack the foundations of the capitalist exploitation at a

global scale: the international capitalist division of labor with the overexploitation of the peoples of the dominated countries, the plundering and the exhaustion of the wealth of the globe which go hand in hand with the exploitation of the workers of the imperialists centers. The countries of Asia, Africa, Latin America are not in crisis but victims of their dependence on a system which plunges the populations into misery, famine and wars.

Another organization of the production and the distribution of wealth, another society, are necessary.

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THE INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

The orientations "officially" conveyed by the CGT are based on a completely different interpretation. They by no means aim at the elimination of the capitalist economy, which is necessary so that the workers can free themselves from their situation of being exploited. Quite on the contrary, the attitude which prevails consists in ratifying the mendacious propaganda according to which capitalism has installed itself definitively and in an irreversible way. Starting from this, the trade union's action could be given no other objective than to express wishes and recommendations, putting them up to the governments, entreating them to accept taking into account the humble observations.

In November 2002, the CGT joined the TUAC ("Trade Union Advisory Committee"), which is an international trade union organization endowed with an advisory status at the OECD. Through the medium of this institution, the CGT, in chorus with the international trade union confederations, turns out vain declarations: *"It falls on the governments of the countries of the G8 and the OECD to give the political impetus necessary in order to respect three essential priorities: the promotion of employment [...] the sustainable development [...] the reduction of the disparities between developing countries and countries in transition, and the industrialized world."* (*Le Peuple* n° 1577, 28/5/2003.) Following this propensity to pious wishes, we soon will address a message to the Raffarin government

notifying to him that "it falls on the French government to give the political impetus necessary in order to make the happiness of the workers"...

The economic development of the planet cannot meet the needs of humanity as long as the laws of the working order of the capitalist economy prevail with respect to the relationship between employers and workers as well as the relations of competition and imperialist domination at the global level. The UNO, the IMF, the World Bank, the OMC are essential agents of the capitalist, imperialist, policy. It is out of question to reform them. They should be eliminated.

However this is not what the CGT thinks of doing, as far as it expresses itself by the voice of a certain number of leaders. *"The world markets and in particular the financial markets must be monitored at the international level by means of rules and institutions [...]. The governments must clearly pledge to act so that the institutions which are underpinning the multilateralism act in favor of the workers and their families."* (*Le Peuple* n° 1577, 28/5/2003.) Here you see the servant appealing to the Master from under the table so that it be magnanimous.

It is true that the expressed positions remain coherent throughout. Since obviously one cannot ask the capitalist class to scuttle itself, what does one recommend?: *"a world-wide plan of economic reactivation intended to increase the purchasing power of low incomes*

[...]" (*Le Peuple* n° 1577, 28/5/2003) - i.e. the stimulation of the capitalist economy!

The increase in the inequalities remains striking. Let us take by way of example the gap between the average incomes of the 20 % of the world population living in the richest countries and of the 20 % living in the poorest countries. According to certain estimates, it passed from 30 against 1 in 1960 to 74 against 1 in 1995. In 1998, the total fortune of the 200 richest people of the world exceeded the combined gross domestic product of a group of the poorest countries gathering 41 % of the world population.

What does one hope for as result of a "plan of economic reactivation"? Some bureaucrats and experts, in the statistics, whose development makes their livelihood and their pride, will perhaps be able to announce a quivering in the evolution of the percentages "in favor" of the poor. However the basic problem will remain entirely. Indeed, even supposing that a momentary improvement of the "economic situation" attenuates here and there the external signs of poverty, this will not change anything with respect to the fact that the huge mass of the workers in the world does not live but survives miserably, to undergo exploitation to the profit of the capitalists.

The economic growth within the framework of the capitalist system is based fundamentally on the exploitation of the workers, the misery of the toilers, of the unemployed. No "sustainable and healthy growth" is possible under these conditions.

EUROPE

Our joining the EMF (European Metalworkers' Federation) and the IMF (International Metalworkers' Federation) ratifies the integration of the FTM-CGT into the international trade-unionism such as it is, i.e. a trade-unionism which recognizes the need for the market and the international division of labor. In the program of the EMF, one finds before all one of the essential ideas basic

to class collaboration, that which aims at inculcating to the workers the lie according to which their salvation lies in the prosperity of the capital, and the improvement of their situation is tributary of the "good health" of the companies and more generally of a favorable economic conjuncture. In a "Report on the management of reorganizations", the EMF writes: *"Only competitive companies can cre-*

ate and secure the stable, highly valued and well paid jobs [...]. Companies and their employees therefore have a shared interest in efficiently managing the process of adaptation to change through restructuring."

Integrate oneself into the process of implementation of the European Union, (like the CGT does in saying "yes" to the European constitution) which incarnates capital, is to accept constraints being added to those which we already undergo on behalf of the national State apparatus, which too is a defender of the interests of the French and the international bourgeoisie. We must as much as possible block the "standards" that the European Commission tries and will try to impose on us, because in no way they correspond to the needs of the workers. Wherever the working class will wait until its "rights" are issued from the top, it will always be in situation of loser. On the other hand, if it fights for its material claims from in the perspective of the abolition of capitalism, it will consequently impose acceptance in practice of the improvement of its situation, on its respective governments. And this will be the best base for an international solidarity.

The European Works' Councils can potentially provide an important framework of action to our international activity. But these structures, with some exceptions, are displaying pseudo-"concertation" and "social information". More generally, the EMF does not provide us with valid tools for fight. During months in several European countries millions of employees fought to defend their pension

system without the FEM taking the least initiative to link these combats together.

The functioning of these organizations and their relations to the institutions at European or global level are very opaque. The participation of many comrades in the structures and commissions reduces their presence within their companies. In a similar way, the appointment of EMF Coordinators poses problems of respect of the trade-union democracy. And the weakness of our answers does not enable us to intervene and weigh our actual weight in gatherings such as the European and World Social Forums.

The federal direction wants to be pragmatic: *"If, being inside the EMF, we maintain this cleavage in the state of mind, the one assuming that there are "those who are of class and the others", we would not make move what starts to create a dynamics [...]"* (Daniel Sanchez, *Le Guide du Militant de la Métallurgie*, n° 293, December 2002.) However, to hold, like does the CGT within the ETUC (European Trade-Union Congress), a post of secretary (since the last congress) - this indeed implies to take on the orientations of the ETUC and the EMF as such. The remainder is only verbosity trying to justify the unjustifiable.

Facing these facts, our very objective just remains to build the trade-union tools (coordinations, places for debates and for confrontations of experiences) through which we will be able to defend our conceptions of the trade-unionism as instrument of the class, which shall preserve its independence and integrate the participation of the masses.

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In one way or another these questions lead up to central stakes which arise on the level of the CGT as a whole. **At the last congress of the ETUC held in May 2003, its outgoing secretary-general, Emilio Gabaglio, noted: "Negotiation is our business."** (Cf. *La Nouvelle Vie ouvrière*, 6/6/2003.) As for

that, the "official" orientation of the CGT is in perfect harmony with the ETUC, by making the promotion of the institutionalized "trade-unionism of negotiation". Bernard Thibault affirms that *"the mode of relations between trade-unions and employers needs to be completely reconsidered"* (*La Nouvelle Vie ou-*

vrière, 11/1/2002). It would be convenient that the employees put forward their particular "interests" and "aimings" in an institutionalized manner, in competition with the employers and the shareholders, who do so in the same way, from their point of view, all of these being supposedly placed on an equal footing.

No, since the birth of capitalism, and as long as this social system will remain as the dominating one, no "mode of relations between the trade-unions and employers" could

nor can ensure the defense of the workers. Of course, the working class, the toilers, in so far as they carry out fights in a consequent way, while making play the force that class solidarity confers to them, can obtain partial successes in defense of their interests. **However, let us be clear: this class struggle is necessarily deployed in total rupture with any "system of social relations", which never is anything else than a strait jacket by which the capitalist class tries to anaesthetize and to immobilize the workers.**

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IT IS NECESSARY TO STRUCTURE INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION OF TRADE-UNIONS ON THE BASIS OF THE INTERESTS OF THE WORKING CLASS

The "official" federal direction endeavors to involve the federation in the wake of reformism while asserting that *"we fully join up the actions of the EMF, keeping as permanent concern to make out of it an effective and reactive European trade-union tool, which we need"*. (Pascal Nonat at the meeting of the Federal Executive Committee, 21/1/2004, cf. *Courrier fédéral*, n° 762.) Effective and reactive at the service of an orientation which goes against the interests of the working class...

What it is necessary to undertake, is something completely different: to impel the structured co-operation at the international level between trade-unions which are placed in class opposition with respect to the capital and the bourgeoisie. Valid prospects in this sense exist undoubtedly. Reformism prevails certainly within the bureaucratic authorities of the various confederations, in particular the ICFTU (International Confederation of Free Trade-Unions) to which the IMF (International Metalworkers' Federation) belongs. But everywhere in the world, especially in the countries dominated by imperialism, exist trade-unions which persist

in defending the fundamental interests of the working class. Many are those which have kept an image of the CGT as a sister organization ready to catalyze and guide the international trade-union movement on the right way.

If we put the federation back on the rails of resolute opposition to capital, we will indeed be able to contribute in a substantial manner in this way, by re-establishing again contacts with trade-union organizations, which themselves refuse to be integrated into class collaboration.

Our will to act firmly with the aim of keeping alive the tradition of the authentic international trade-union movement, such as it took its rise more than a century ago, isn't by any means ascribable to a sterile nostalgia for the past. Quite on the contrary, the current multiplication of social movements can only give again a renewed importance to the paramount role which falls on the working class in the fight against the capitalist system.

This is a fundamental stake for the world trade-union movement.

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