

An International Youth Conference Met This Summer

(this report has been drawn up by the young French participants)

Seventy young people from Azania (South Africa), Belgium, the United States, France, Palestine, Russia, Turkey and Zimbabwe met on 27 August near Paris for an international conference of young people against war. The young delegates from Afghanistan and Burundi were unable to participate, as their visas had been refused.

The meeting decided to inform the International Workers Committee Against War And Exploitation, For A Worker's International, about its works.

Who are we ?

- The International Workers Committee Against War, Exploitation, for a Workers' International (IWC) was set up at the World Conference held in Mumbai (India) on November 19, 20 and 21 gathering delegates from 28 countries.

- The IWC was set up on the basis of the Mumbai Manifesto against war, exploitation and precarious labour which was endorsed by labour activist and trade union and political organisations officers from 46 countries (*)

- Its continuations committee is composed of labour activists from all political/ trade union backgrounds:

Innocent Assogba (Benin),
Alan Benjamin (USA),
Colia Clark (USA),
Constantin Cretan (Romania),
Berthony Dupont (Haiti),
Ney Ferreira (Brazil),
Daniel Gluckstein (France),
Rubina Jamil (Pakistan),
Apo Leung (China),
Gloria Gracida (Mexico),
M.A. Patil (India),
Mandlenkosi Phangwa (Azania),
Klaus Schüller (Germany),
Jung Sikhwa (Korea),
John Sweeney (Great Britain),
Mark Vassilev (Russia),
Nambiath Vasudevan (India).

(*) Afghanistan, Argentina,
Austria, Azania, Belarus,
Bangladesh, Belgium, Benin,
Brazil, Burundi, Canada,
Chile, China, Czech Republic,
Ecuador, France, Germany,
Great Britain, Greece, Haiti,
Hungary, Iceland, India,
Ireland, Italy, Ivory Coast,
Korea, Mali, Mexico,
Pakistan, Peru, Philippines,
Portugal, Romania, Russia,
Rwanda, Senegal, Sweden,
Switzerland, Togo, Tunisia,
Turkey, Ukraine, USA,
Venezuela, Zimbabwe.

The Conference Opens: "No to War!" No to Occupation!"

A young activist of JR (Jeunesse Révolution – Revolution Youth) in France began by recalling the reasons for which JR had taken the initiative several months earlier to convene this conference, following the meeting of young people from different countries at the World Conference against War, Exploitation and Precarious Labour (November 2016, in Mumbai, India). He read a letter from Afghanistan, sent by a young activist from the LRA (Left Radical of Afghanistan.) (See our last issue)

The young people from Afghanistan concluded their letter as follows:

"We heartily expect you, friends, to keep up and continue your struggle and campaign in defence of Afghanistan anti-occupation resistance and call on your governments to end the occupation and stop the intervention. The hundreds of billions of dollars wasted by US and NATO in Afghanistan have only created a human tragedy and countrywide chaos, and the Trump administration is confused about how to hide their defeat in Afghanistan and be accountable to their people. The money they are devastating in a dirty war in Afghanistan must be utilised in social welfare programmes, to the benefit of youth and workers back home.

"Long live solidarity between the youth of Afghanistan and France!

"No to war and occupation!"

Despite the obstacles raised by the governments of the major powers, such as. for example, the refusal by the French government to grant a visa to our comrade, the conference then decided to gather together behind a banner that read, *"US/NATO Out of Afghanistan Now!"* and to immediately send the photo to Afghanistan.



The conference also decided to address the young people of Afghanistan and the young people of Burundi, a country located in the region of the Great Lakes of Africa, neighbouring Rwanda - where, as one of the JR comrades reminded us, *"over a million Rwandans were murdered by militia in complicity with, or even with the direct involvement of, the major powers"* - and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, whose mineral wealth has been the origin of wars of decomposition that have lasted for years now.

Then the comrades from different countries took turns reporting on what is happening where they live, and the reasons for which they were attending the conference.

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The delegates take the floor:

Zimbabwe

"Because the white farmers were expropriated, our country was considered as 'non-democratic' by the UN and the US"

Chenai, a young student at the University of Gweru, in Zimbabwe, spoke in the name of the group Chimurenga* Vanguard.

"My country, Zimbabwe, used to be the jewel of Africa, but it has been reduced to a beggar state by imperialism. The international sanctions taken against my country by the United States and the European Union are a means of pressure which affects the whole population. Zimbabwe is a country in the south of Africa with a Black majority, colonised by the British in 1890. The land that had been the property of the tribal chiefs was expropriated by the colonisers, whilst the Blacks were pushed back to the arid regions. In 1980, the country wrested its independence, but the land remained in the hands of the white majority. In the early 2000s, small landless Black peasants began to mobilise to divide up the land of the white farmers, who were expropriated without compensation. We believe that this expropriation is legitimate, because the land should belong to the majority and, in Zimbabwe, the majority is Black. The international sanctions were decreed because the land had been taken back from the white farmers: Zimbabwe was considered as a 'non-democratic' country by the UN and the major western powers."

This, according to Chenai, explains the need for pursuing the campaign for the immediate lifting of all the international sanctions against Zimbabwe, for the respect of its sovereignty and the right of the majority to take possession of its own land.

*"Chimurenga" means "rebellion" in the Shona language

Russia

"The way to understand how Russia has evolved is by looking at the lives of ordinary people"

"I am going to speak to you in the language of Lenin," began Natalya, a young worker and activist in Russia. In order to better understand the situation in her country over these past years, she said: "I am going to tell you a little about my own life, because the way to understand how Russia has evolved is by looking at the lives of ordinary people. I was born in a small village, in a family of poor peasants. But even in this very poor little village, my mother had been able to get a university education, thanks to the October Revolution. She became a Russian teacher, whilst my father worked on a kolkhoze [i.e., a collective farm in the former Soviet Union]. When the Soviet Union collapsed, thousands of these collective farms were abandoned, and my father was not able to find work in the village. In the 1990s, after the fall of the USSR, Boris Yeltsin opened the country to "the market economy" and industrial production – which was incapable of facing up to the competition – collapsed. My mother, like millions of others, did not get her pay for months on end. My family only survived because we had a cow, and it was thanks to that cow that we were able to survive for years. At the end of the 1990s, Putin was elected president. Many say that, since then, after that period of chaos, the situation has "stabilised". Because Putin took protectionist measures – exclusively to defend the interest of the Russian oligarchs – wages could then once again be paid. That said, what Putin "stabilised" was first and foremost the corruption and plundering by the oligarchs, which became almost legal. In Russia, the right to go on strike and even simply to express oneself freely is very limited. The development of labour organisations is only just beginning. The pressures of nationalism and the remains of the patriarchy are still very strong. But I am confident, because things are beginning to change."

Azania/South Africa

"War is also the war against the workers, and the Marikana Massacre"

Lucky, an activist in the student branch of the EFF party (1) in Durban, South Africa, explained that war is also the war against the workers. *"It is appalling to see the current vice-president of the ANC (2), Cyril Ramaphosa, positioning himself as the future president of the country, whereas he is known to be a ruthless capitalist who is implicated in the Marikana Massacre, where 34 workers were brutally killed by the police (16 August 2012) only for demanding a decent living wage of 12,500 rands. But they were also murdered because their strike threatened the interests of Lonmin, the multinational mining group."*

Lucky also told the story of the tens of thousands of Black students in the combat for the movement "Fees Must Fall" ("FMMF", "university registration fees must fall"). *"It is a movement whose focus is not restricted to the cancelling of university fees, as some would have it believed, but for the demand of free education for all. The question of free education for all is not just a university question but an issue that concerns the whole Black working class – and that raises the question of what type of society we want to live in."*

This movement carries within itself *"the capacity for, together, bringing down the whole system of oppression against the Black majority, and not only for the students' sake, but for the future Black Republic at large."*

But, like all mass mobilisations, *"this movement lacks both an organised structure and an elected leadership acting in conformity with the mandate that the students give it."*

(1) The Economic Freedom Fighters, the party that broke with the ANC after the Marikana Massacre

(2) The African National Congress, the party in power in South Africa since 1994.