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By Luis Miguel Busto Mauleón
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Interview with George Mavrikos, former Secretary General of the World Federation of Trade Unions (and III)

"The 'ghost' of the working class returns to the whole world and makes the bourgeoisie see even today, in its nightmares, the workers' struggles"



Sources: Rebellion

Translation from Greek by Christoforos Giakoumelos.

The third (and final) part of the interview deals with the basic ideological pillars of the WFTU as well as the retreat of Mavrikos to rear positions in the workers' movement.

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IV. Rome, full stop

12- -The 18th Congress of the WFTU has ended and you leave the responsibility of the General Secretariat. Are the problems of the workers still the same or have they changed?

The same causes that have dictated the positions of the WFTU over the years to raise the standard of living of the working class are still present here. The exploitation of man by man is here; the core of capitalist exploitation, that is, the extraction of surplus value from the working class, is here; the sweat stolen from our class brothers continues to end up in the pockets of the bourgeoisie; imperialist wars and interventions are still here. In short, the roots of all the basic problems for the workers of the world remain intact.

I could even say that to a large extent the terms in which the world working class sells its labour power have worsened not only in the so-called "developing" countries but also in the large capitalist centres where the working class has traditionally enjoyed a relatively better standard of living. This happened either as a result of serious and massive class struggles, of a continuous demand, or as a result of "concessions" of the bourgeoisie of these countries to their workers against the socialist system to shield their own power. From 1991 onwards there has been a systematic "thaw" - as I told you before - of great achievements of the working class, which was produced by the decline of the class current of the trade union movement, the retreat of the struggles, the domination of reformism and the illusions in a large part of the working class.



Con Evo Morales Ayma en Cochabamba, Bolivia, 2014

Por lo tanto, los problemas a los que se enfrenta la clase obrera en esta fase de decadencia final del sistema capitalista son aún más complejos, y aunque el núcleo de dichos problemas permanece invariable, su forma puede cambiar. Creo que un ejemplo típico de esto es la discusión sobre la llamada cuarta revolución industrial, que de hecho es un punto central de análisis en muchas discusiones sobre el futuro del trabajo y más allá. Se habla de automatización, desuso de fuerzas productivas, sustitución total del factor humano por las máquinas, etc.

Es sabido que las fuerzas productivas y el potencial productivo que de ellas se deriva son el resultado de un proceso interminable en el que tanto los medios de producción como el trabajo humano evolucionan progresivamente, en función de la explotación y perfeccionamiento de los conocimientos existentes de la humanidad, el saber hacer, la ciencia y la tecnología. Incluso bajo el capitalismo las fuerzas productivas no dejan de evolucionar. Y el conocimiento y el saber hacer humanos, así como los medios de producción más avanzados e innovadores (por ejemplo, la inteligencia artificial, de la que tanto se habla) son todos un proceso social en constante evolución. Las «nuevas» reflexiones sobre la relación de la clase obrera y la tecnología deberían iluminar **la esencia** del problema que es **la contradicción** entre el carácter social del conocimiento, los medios y técnicas de producción por un lado, y la propiedad individual de los medios de producción por el otro.

En otras palabras, el tema era y sigue siendo que los productos resultantes de este proceso que mencionamos están en manos de una pequeña minoría de la sociedad. Y al mismo tiempo que hay posibilidades para que la clase obrera trabaje menos, se informe y participe más en la vida política y social –para vivir mejor, para decirlo simplemente– ve que sus condiciones de vida se deterioran. Por lo tanto, cuando se habla de «nuevos problemas» de la clase obrera, quizás se olvida que problemas similares preocuparon al movimiento obrero también en otros períodos históricos. Seguro que recuerda a los luditas, ese movimiento en Inglaterra durante la revolución industrial en 1810-1812, que rompían máquinas y las tiraban a la calle porque creían que los culpables de su pobreza eran ellas y no sus patronos. Entonces, es una gran apuesta para la clase obrera moderna no caer en los errores del pasado, no sucumbir a un neo-ludismo.

El mismo análisis puede arrojar luz sobre otros nuevos fenómenos que agravan la difícil situación de la clase obrera en la actualidad, como el teletrabajo que se ha generalizado en el período de la pandemia. Y aquí queda claro que las nuevas tecnologías fueron nuevamente explotadas para exprimir todavía más a la clase obrera, para una mayor extracción de plusvalía. Por otro lado, no hay que subestimar los hechos; los sindicatos clasistas tenemos el deber de analizar la realidad con nuestras herramientas revolucionarias, para responder científicamente con base en los principios de nuestra cosmovisión a los nuevos fenómenos que la vida nunca dejará de dar a luz; siempre teniendo claro que sólo la abolición de la propiedad capitalista, la «expropiación de los expropiadores» acabará de una vez por todas con la barbarie capitalista que es la causa fundamental de estos problemas.

13– La FSM se autodenomina antiimperialista. ¿Cómo influye el imperialismo en el mundo laboral?

El antiimperialismo, la postura antiimperialista del movimiento clasista es parte de su ADN. No es solo una suposición teórica, no se trata de “una buena voluntad evangélica”. Se deriva de una visión y un análisis particulares del mundo y, al mismo tiempo, compromete a las fuerzas de clase con una actitud y acción particulares sobre una serie de cuestiones. Se puede decir que la lucha antiimperialista es un criterio para separar las fuerzas clasistas consecuentes de las reformistas. La posición de clase consecuente reconoce que la guerra imperialista es la continuación de la política imperialista por la vía militar, es decir, es la otra cara de la política del capital que golpea los logros de los trabajadores/as. De hecho, creo que la experiencia de la Primera y la Segunda Guerra Mundial es rica y útil. La propia FSM, como dijimos antes, nació como fruto de la acción antiimperialista de los trabajadores/as luego de la Gran Victoria Antifascista de los Pueblos en 1945.

En efecto, hoy, cuando la agresión imperialista y las rivalidades entre poderosos bloques imperialistas por el control y explotación de mercados, recursos naturales y rutas energéticas son aún mayores, la brutalidad imperialista genera más efectos negativos para los trabajadores/as: más políticas antiobreras y antipopulares, hambre, crisis alimentaria, pobreza, moderno tráfico de esclavos. ¿No obligan todos estos factores a al menos 71 millones de personas en todo el mundo -según los datos de la ONU- a abandonar sus

hogares? Entre ellos hay unos 26 millones de refugiados y cada minuto se estima que 20 personas dejan todo atrás para escapar de la guerra, la persecución, el terror.

Consideremos específicamente qué sufrimientos han causado las rivalidades imperialistas a los pueblos de varios países: las sanciones impuestas por un campo imperialista contra el otro, ¿qué consecuencias han tenido para los pueblos de Rusia, Venezuela, Irán, Bielorrusia, la República Popular Democrática de Corea, etc.? Especialmente cada guerra abierta, cada intervención abierta provocada por los intereses imperialistas, ¿qué situaciones generó para los pueblos y trabajadores/as de estos países? En Libia, que quedó arrasada tras la intervención de la OTAN de 2011, en Yemen con la guerra sucia que se prolonga desde hace más de 7 años, en Afganistán, Irak, Siria, Yugoslavia... Gran parte de su población, civiles, perecieron en el conflicto mientras que millones se vieron obligados a abandonar su tierra natal.



In Madrid, at the Monument of the International Brigades, 2018

The imperialists redraw the borders with the blood of the peoples for their own geopolitical interests; they crush countries where they will find lucrative exploitative ground for their monopolies when the time comes for "reconstruction"; at the same time they generate entire "armies of the desperate" that are created from refugees and immigrants who will serve as cheap reserves for capitalist production. How many times have we not seen capitalism since its first steps, when it wants to increase production,

exploit the uprooted as cheap labor in miserable and dangerous conditions of work with starvation wages?

But the future that the imperialists prepare for the peoples seems anything but rosy: the "NATO 2030 Strategy", the "Common Foreign and Security Policy of the EU", the "Strategic Compass for Security and Defence" and the "Global Gateway of the EU", the war plans and the approach of imperialist interest towards the vast Indo-Pacific region, the role of QUAD (USA, The US-Japan-Australia-India) and AUKUS (Australia, UK, USA) are plans that should concern workers around the world. At the same time, "hot spots" are multiplying in a number of countries, while the arms race has broken all records, with \$2.1 trillion spent by 2021!

Precisely for this reason, in the face of such a complex reality, the correct reading of imperialism is of enormous importance for the work and actions of the class trade union movement itself. Because really, if you do not understand the economic roots of this phenomenon, if you do not take into account its political and social importance, you cannot take a single step in the field of defining the practical tasks of the trade union movement. The analysis that limits imperialism, for example, to the aggressive foreign policy of the US or the powerful EU states and excludes other capitalist states, eliminates the basic criterion, that is, the domination of monopolies, the economic basis of imperialism. This analysis clings to the unequal relations formed by the unequal development of the system, justifies not only the bourgeoisie of the states that are not at the top of the imperialist pyramid, but also the role of the bourgeois states expressing their interests, thus turning the workers' movement into a tail of the bourgeoisie of each country and leading it along very dangerous paths. These positions form the basis of the so-called "multipolar world", which is based on the logic of "bad" and "good" monopolies and capitalist states; their criterion is their attitude towards the US. In this way, these positions set aside the essence of imperialist antagonisms and lead entire workers' movements to side with one or the other imperialist centre. In short, I believe that this line is a dead end, it causes great damage to the workers' movement and it is necessary to further intensify the struggle against these positions, to combat the illusions that they generate and to realize the decisive importance of the monopolies that constitute the cell of the economic base of imperialism, of the economy-political relationship.

14 – It is also anti-capitalist. In your opinion, is capitalism in decline or is it living its best moments?

Both theoretically and practically, this question is inextricably linked to the previous one. It is the Leninist theory of imperialism itself that scientifically proves that imperialism, as the highest phase of capitalism, is the era of the final decadence of a system that no longer has anything to offer humanity. In monopoly capitalism all the contradictions that have characterized capitalist society since its birth are sharpened. Capitalist monopoly, while engendering "inevitably a tendency to stagnation and decadence," leads at the same time to the broadest socialization of production and is the best "material preparation," the last step before the revolutionary overthrow of capitalism. In other words, the domination of big business by shares in the capitalist economy functions as a precursor to the new society, as evidence of the maturation of the material conditions for the overcoming of capitalism.

Everything around us testifies that capitalism is incapable of overcoming its contradictions. We can still say that it has not yet overcome the consequences of its crisis of the 70s and although it is in a prolonged decline, it refuses to die. Certainly the counterrevolutionary overthrows of the 90s gave it an extension, a breath of life, with new fields of profit, new "virgin" markets that had remained outside the capitalist economic sphere for more than half a century. The global and synchronized crisis of 2008 shook capitalism and, on the occasion of the pandemic, the world capitalist economy is already entering a new cycle of crisis, deeper and more acute, as the bourgeois analyses themselves admit.

That is why capitalism is increasingly showing its reactionary and ageing face as well as its inability to resolve basic questions of the survival of the people. Look at the period of the pandemic, when the "fig leaf" of the powerful capitalist states fell and the king was shown to be naked; when we saw the collapse of the health systems of the US, Italy, etc., patients dying in hospital corridors, "allied" states stealing ventilators and medical equipment from each other... But also on the other hand, what did the course of vaccinations show next? When, for example, African states had no vaccines and suffered from almost zero vaccination coverage, isn't there talk again of the failure of capitalism?

You know, this reminds me of Fidel Castro's great phrase: "They talk about the failure of socialism, but where is the success of capitalism in Africa, Asia, Latin America?"

See even the most recent example with the hypocritical concern of the bourgeois about the world food crisis they "discovered" after the NATO-Russia war on the territory of Ukraine. It is a fact that Ukraine and Russia are large exporters of cereals and fertilizers (together they account for about 30% of world wheat exports and 20% of maize exports, while Russia accounts for 14% of world fertilizer exports) and, of course, war operations on Ukrainian soil, the blockade of Ukrainian Black Sea ports, coordinated Euro-Atlantic sanctions against Russia and Russian countermeasures have multiple consequences on the critical food sector. But, at the same time, there is a continuous increase in the number of hungry people in all international reports. Specifically, it states that "the number (of hungry people) has increased by 80% since 2016, when around 108 million people in 48 countries were acutely food insecure and in need of urgent help", while "the number (of hungry) almost doubled between 2016 and 2021 after going from 94 million to 180 million". So imagine the absurdity of a system that so blatantly marginalizes people's needs: at the same time that wealthy tycoons go into space in their private spaceships, at the same time that productive capacities have reached unprecedented levels, humanity is still discussing whether there are people who are hungry. Capitalism is breathing its last breaths and this reminds me a lot of a phrase of the Roman philosopher Cicero when he said that "the closer the fall of an empire is, the more absurd its laws are". In our case, the greater the absurdity of the system...

15 – How is the class workers' movement fighting against fascism?

It is a fact that in recent decades the need for an anti-fascist struggle of the trade unions has re-emerged. The rise of xenophobia, racism, neo-Nazism, nurtured and grown by EU and US money on the fertile ground of crisis, destitution, mass impoverishment and de-massification of the trade unions, put the issue of the anti-fascist struggle through the trade union ranks back on the agenda.

The history of the movement of the working class shows that in historical periods when capitalism feels threatened, the bourgeoisie has the capacity to be flexible in its tactics, to make new political representatives appear who sell them as something "fresh"; it also

pushes into the bourgeois political arena political forces that once vegetated in darkness. The character of fascism as a bourgeois political force is clearly demonstrated by historical experience itself, which must not be forgotten. After assuming governmental power in Italy and Germany, with the generous support of monopoly capital, fascism proceeded to a multifaceted support of the interests of the capitalists, crushing the workers' movement and attempting a counterrevolutionary armed overthrow of the vanguard of the world workers' movement, of Soviet power.

On the other hand, the movement, both in my country and in yours, knows very well from its historical experience that the existence of fascism fulfills another function, less obvious but very important for the system: the social democratic parties take advantage of the fear of "ultra-rightists" to ensure support for their own policy of managing the system, thus presenting itself as the so-called "lesser evil" for the popular layers. After all, we have seen this scenario dozens of times in many countries.



At the third PAME Congress, 2007

However, as to the substance of the matter, all fascist forces are part of the system and everywhere actively and decisively promote the main axes of the bourgeois strategy for capitalist development. More generally, they support the dictatorship of capital. They promote class cooperation in the name of the single national interest, obscure the capital-labour contradiction and seek to crush the labour movement by presenting labour struggles and demands as responsible for high unemployment. Throughout the years of the crisis,

the fraudulent "anti-plutocratic" and "patriotic" rhetoric of these organizations aims to disorient and trap popular discontent, leaving the real enemy, the bourgeoisie, alone and projecting as guilty immigrants, certain speculators and bankers, etc.

That is why the struggle of the workers' movement against the fascist formations is an indispensable condition for the workers' counterattack of which we speak. With this perspective, the class trade union movement must realize that fascism is synonymous with capitalism, "flesh of its flesh" and its gold reserve. So the real anti-fascist struggle is also an anti-capitalist struggle. Brecht had said it characteristically in his text: "The Five Difficulties in Telling the Truth":

"Therefore, how can an opponent of fascism tell the truth about fascism when he does not want to say anything against the capitalism that engenders it? How can this truth be of practical importance?"

Those who are against fascism, without being against capitalism, who lament the barbarism caused by barbarism, resemble those people, who want to eat their ration of beef, but without having to slaughter the beef. They want to eat the beef but not see the blood. They will be content with the butcher washing his hands before serving them the meat. They are not against the property relations that produce barbarism, only against barbarism. They raise their voice against barbarism, and they do so in countries where the property is the same, but where butchers still wash their hands before serving the meat."

Therefore, any approach that separates fascism from the system that engenders it is doomed to failure and bankruptcy. Thus, the trade union struggle that targets fascism as a theory and as a practice at the service of capital can emerge victorious.

At the same time, I apologize for the long hiatus I am going to make, but I want to highlight a useful point about something that takes away momentum from the anti-fascist trade union struggle: the tolerance towards social democracy that has historically fueled or collaborated with fascism on many occasions. Fascism not only shares historical origins, to a large extent, with Social Democracy, in the sense that many of its main leaders in the interwar period came from Social Democracy (Mussolini – former editor of the newspaper

"Avanti", central organ of the Italian Socialists, Piłsudski – former leader of the Polish Socialist Party, Mosley – former minister of MacDonald's second Labour government); moreover, the ideology of fascism derives mainly from the line drawn up by social democracy. The ideology of social democracy was really the breeding ground of fascism in the interwar period. Social democracy emerged from the war with two clear characteristics: First, the alignment of each party with its own "national" – that is, imperialist – state and the rejection of all but the most formal internationalism. Secondly, class collaboration in the form of alliance with the government and trade union consensus to help build capitalist prosperity as a necessary condition for the prosperity of the working class. It will be seen that these basic principles already approximate the basic principles of "National Socialism".

After the First World War, Social Democracy took on two tasks: First, to defeat the revolution of the working class; second, to help rebuild the damaged structure of capitalism. The first task led the social democratic leadership to a close alliance with reactionary, militarist and White Guard circles and "trained" it to assume government responsibility for exterminating militant workers. The second task of capitalist reconstruction, once the period of direct civil war was over, required an ever closer collaboration of social democracy and the trade unions with monopoly capitalism.

At the same time, social democracy historically helped both fascism in many cases to rise to power, and reactionary elements to crush the action of the class workers' movement. Consider the treacherous role of the German Social Democratic leaders in the German revolution of November 1918, when in collusion with the reactionary armed groups they massacred the leaders of the German proletariat Karl Liebknecht and Rosa Luxemburg and crushed the revolution. The front against social democracy must therefore play a leading role in our anti-fascist action. Stalin's conclusion that "you cannot end capitalism without ending the social democratic ideology in the workers' movement" is no coincidence.

16 – In recent years, women's struggle for gender equality and against the patriarchal system has also been reborn. Has the WFTU risen to the occasion?

In recent years, and on the occasion of the ILO's campaign for the ratification of Convention 190 on Violence and Harassment at Work, an intense conversation has been ignited around "gender equality" and "the patriarchal system". So, some people automatically wondered what role unions have to play in this? What could be their contribution to such a struggle?

First of all, let me tell you that for the WFTU no new debate was opened; the struggle of working women was not "reborn", simply because for us the struggle for women's equality, for real equality between the two sexes, never died. For us in the WFTU, in the class trade union movement, the role of working women is fundamental. The role of working women in the labour process, in the trade unions, in the political struggle, can give additional strength to the popular struggles of the present and the future. The class trade union movement has always held a firm position and has constantly fought for equal rights for women workers, for equality at work and all aspects of life; she fought to end slavery and trafficking in women, for the right of women to vote, for their right to participate in trade unions, in political parties, for their presence in government and state positions as well as for the participation of women in social and cultural activities. Many of these rights have become a reality in socialist countries where working women had their rightful status. These achievements of women in the then Soviet Union and the rest of the socialist states generated the social force and pressure to advance certain conquests also in the capitalist states. In the latter, for example, the granting of universal suffrage to adult women was significantly delayed, not because it was an element incompatible with capitalist functioning, but because the survival of capitalism is also based on the mobilization-integration of pre-capitalist reactionary forces, for example of the mechanisms of manipulation of the popular forces possessed by the religious confessions and their ecclesiastical structures.

Unfortunately, after the counterrevolutionary overthrows in the period 1989-1991 and the change in the international correlation of forces, many of the rights and achievements of women and men were taken away from them. Today in all capitalist countries, working women are subject to relentless exploitation. She works mostly part-time, in temporary and unprotected jobs. She is being paid less than men and accessing lower pensions. The working woman is the first to become unemployed. In many countries, violence against women is on the rise, prostitution and trafficking networks are spreading, economic

migration is separating many mothers from their children and husbands. Working women today have an increasingly limited right of access to education, cultural activity and leisure time.

So today, going through the third decade of the twenty-first century, in many countries we are reaching the point of seeing an incredible social degradation of women, their dependence on men, obscurantist perceptions and practices, multifaceted violence against women coming from male family members, etc. The reaction to the above phenomenon by theoretical feminist currents and movements, mainly from European and US countries, is often accompanied by a wrong explanation of the phenomenon: it is interpreted as a result of globalization, that is, the importation of capital and, therefore, the expansion of capitalist relations that have a dissolving effect on the agricultural community (as the main productive unit of women's labor); moreover, according to these approaches, this effect is accompanied by the expansion of violence against women and the strengthening of male power; a regime they characterize as "patriarchy." This view idealizes the previous situation, although it correctly highlights capitalist violence, which of course is not only practiced on women, but also on men. And so, on this basis, it exaggerates the role of the feminist movement and even detaches it from the class approach, from the workers' movement as the bearer of the struggle against capitalism.

At the same time, this vision aims to disorient the working class, divide it, incite women workers to fight against the workers and vice versa. In addition, it obscures the fact that not all women have the same problems, often hiding the class root of the problem. When we talk about the "gender issue" we mean the additional exploitation that women suffer in society as a result of their gender (i.e. we are talking about a combination of social and gender discrimination). These discriminations have mental, cultural and moral repercussions, since women are prevented from developing their skills fully and in full equality. However, the core of the problem is that these negative effects concern first and foremost the women of the working class, of the poor peasantry, of the poor self-employed strata. On the other hand, the women of the bourgeoisie find the means and the possibilities to solve their problems.

So the solution and the way out lies in the common struggles of women and men against the social system that engenders the exploitation of man by man. After all, the class trade

union movement has the task of fighting for small and big problems until the final liberation of our class. This was also the compass that the WFTU followed, with special consideration and attention to the organic inclusion of women in the struggles of the class trade union movement, not as a decorative element, but as an integral part and condition of the final triumph of the working class.

As WSF we fight against anachronistic perceptions, we fight for the creation of women's committees in the rank-and-file unions, we organize world congresses of working women, we fight for the representation of our class sisters in the governing bodies of the trade unions, we open a front against bourgeois and reformist concepts about the role of the women's movement, we established a World Committee of Working Women. Always bearing in mind that on the banners and flags of the WFTU were written the most progressive demands, the most advanced positions for the substantial emancipation of women; the WFTU's "Charters of Trade Union Rights" have embodied the desires, hopes and demands of women of our class.

17 – National and international employers, bourgeois governments, yellow and collaborationist unions... aren't there many enemies to face?

I will turn the question around and ask myself: Are there not too many enemies that the bourgeoisie and its imperialist mechanisms have to face? Consider the 250 million workers who went on strike in the streets of India in 2020 and paralyzed that huge country, with the unions, members and cadres of the WFTU on the front line of its organizers. Think again of the 110 million WFTU members around the world who live, work and fight for the future of our class. Think of the great strike struggles in France, Greece, Spain, Turkey and so many other countries. If you were in the position of the bourgeois, wouldn't you be afraid that your kingdom would be threatened by the class that already abolished exploitation once historically?



In Mexico City, Mexico, march of the Authentic Front of the Countryside (FAC), 2017

So the truth is that the bourgeois are afraid and that is why they are taking their measures. That is why they spend millions on repressive mechanisms, on new technologies of repression, on NGOs that corrupt consciences. That is why they are promoting all kinds of "Friedrich Ebert Foundations" that will act as "firefighters" for the "extinction" of class struggles. That is why they rewrite and falsify history, that is why they divide the working class in the ways we have commented, that is why they support the yellow unions, that is why they invest in the propaganda of "new generation" with social networks and "fake news", that is, the hybrid intervention of the new mechanisms of ideological repression. In other words, the "ghost" of the working class returns to the whole world and causes the bourgeois to lose sleep and see even today in their nightmares the workers' struggles. The hope for the world working class lies in the struggles that are taking place and developing in every corner of the planet without ceasing.

That is why, as a class trade union movement, we are optimistic about the future. Indeed, the enemies who fight us are many and apparently they are powerful, armed to the teeth, with innumerable means and mechanisms. But the future belongs to us, the future belongs to the class that comes to abolish exploitation once and for all. And in this our stable compass helps us, knowing where we want to go. Because we want to bring the truly new that is being born today to every small or large strike, to every small or large

demonstration. We want a society where prosperity, creativity, productivity and solidarity take the place of profit rot, imperialist wars and the exploitation of man by man. We want the society where working people have the power, a society where the word "exploitation" disappears from dictionaries. And we know we will emerge victorious.

V. The WFTU of the XXI century

18– What is your assessment of the 18th Congress of Rome?

Throughout its history, the WFTU has held the greatest World Trade Union Congresses.

I have participated in Congresses 13, 14, 15, 16, 17 and 18. All the congresses have been congresses of positions of ideological and social search. Unlike the congresses of the ICFTU-CSI which are congresses of struggle for the poltronas, haggling, financial expectations, domes and distribution of power, in our congresses the confrontations were and will always be on the theoretical questions of each era and how our theoretical and ideological options will be applied at a practical level.

So the 18th^{of} Congress was dominated, based on Marxist theory, by the analysis of the contemporary world and the practical tasks that derive from it, with the aim of defending the workers and strengthening the perception of class in the trade union bases.



18th WFTU Congress in Rome, May 2022

So, the main achievement of the 18th Congress is that we discussed, decided and voted on the important text "Priorities 2022-2027", under the title "Rome Declaration". This document is an achievement.

The other important aspect of this Congress is that, while it was an ordinary congress, it actually had the characteristics of an extraordinary congress. Restrictions on international flights, strict health protocols in all countries and the millions of simple people who lost their lives in the coronavirus pandemic, forced us to limit delegates to 450; some of them spoke virtually and many participated in the online votes.

So between such and so many limitations we managed to hold a militant, democratic and unitary congress.

The third element of the 18th Congress is that, for the first time in many decades, we have had a smooth change of leadership. The election of the new Secretary-General was conducted by secret ballot bringing together 92 per cent of the voters. It is the duty of all of us to support the militant line and the new leadership.

Personally, I feel the need to call on all WFTU cadres at all levels to support the principles of the class line and help the new Secretary General. And on this occasion I want to explain that of course I take responsibility, since it was my idea and decision to propose Comrade Pambis Kyritsis as a candidate for this particular office. Some of my dear comrades have made criticisms and said that the new General Secretary is from a small country and a small trade union. I have explained to you and testify to you now and publicly that over the past seven years I have discussed and proposed to people specifically from large unions in Asia, Africa and Europe. For their own reasons, these unions responded negatively.

However, in addition to the election of a new secretary-general, we also had the election of many new cadres, most of whom are also young in age. And we also have again the presence of a woman in the Secretariat.

Everything mentioned above, all together cumulatively, shows that in extraordinary circumstances, with collective work, industriousness and perseverance, we achieve the

goals of the 18th.^{or} Congress. The credit for this success goes also to the members, friends and leaders of USB Italia, who were excellent hosts.

19– What are the biggest challenges for the new leadership of the WFTU?

Challenges and new needs never stop. The guide is the documents voted in Rome and at the same time everything new that events and life bring.

A constant for militant unions are always the demands and rights of wages, social security, pension and work of employees. Imperialist wars and intra-imperialist rivalries are also key issues; certainly, so are the problems of life, the environment, civilization and culture. I personally believe that the problem that will worsen for the next generations of workers is the drastic restriction of democratic and trade union freedoms. Let the warning bell ring loud, let a call for regroupment be launched, a general invitation to fight for the defense and expansion of democratic freedoms, respect for private life, personality and the specific characteristics of each one.

I trust the affiliates and friends of the WFTU who can rise to these challenges because there is a developed sensitivity and genuine interest in all contemporary issues; at the same time we have very good elaborations, for example on water and aquifers, on the working environment and modern needs, on the food issue, cultural issues such as the need to return stolen cultural property to its countries of origin, as well as the cultural issue of protecting native languages and particular dialects. For any new leadership taking over such a large mass trade union organisation, there are three main possibilities:

First, to further develop and strengthen the qualitative and quantitative characteristics of the organization. Second, enter a period of stagnation and third, retreat and retreat.

The WFTU has worthy militants at all levels and we will all work together to strengthen the WFTU; for a numerical and quantitative reinforcement and strengthening, but at the same time qualitative. In the last 20 years, in addition to quantitative improvement, which is also necessary, essential qualitative battles were won, such as this great regroupment based on the principles of the class struggle, the rejection of the theories of class collaboration, such as the bold and courageous stance within international organizations,

such as the conquest of a better level of democratic functioning, such as the open ideological unmasking of the role of the ICFTU-ITUC, the ETUC and their bureaucratic management groups, such as our analyses and positions on the so-called NGOs, the labor aristocracy, the social problems of corruption within the unions and much more.

In my opinion this quality brought massification, pride and satisfaction to our affiliates and cadres. Finally, let me point out an existing risk. Because poverty, unemployment, undeclared work, etc. are growing and rightly entering the front lines of daily action, vigilance is needed so that unions do not simply get caught up in the everyday. Our struggle and the class struggle must always have in the foreground the struggle for the emancipation of the workers, for their liberation from capitalist slavery. Many times daily stress magnifies and absolutizes the present and completely hides from the eyes of workers the necessary future. In this case the unions become co-managers of the system and then the risks to the interests of the workers and to the mission of the unions grow, they swell.

20 – What will be the role of Mavrikos from now on?

He had publicly announced that he would not run for secretary-general again. I explained this from the podium on the 17th^{of} Congress in Durban, South Africa, in front of all the delegates of the Congress. I ask for the understanding of all those comrades who collected signatures and launched campaigns for me to stay. Those who know me personally knew that the announcement I had made in Durban was the product of realism, reflection and awareness.

In my more than 50 years of involvement in social struggles, I have argued that leaders should leave on time, highlight new leaders, and not let time and age defeat them. I have always supported this with words and now is the time to support it by personal example. In my final speech at the 18th Congress, I explained this topic in more detail.

I had prepared myself psychologically, emotionally and politically for this change in my life. I was ready. I was not surprised, although the change in the form of daily "operation" is great. The habits of half a century are not easily reversed.

Of course, I'm not "going home," I'm not going to "go on a spree." I consciously take my place in the "rear" as a simple soldier, but having the weapon at my fingertips. I have already been in talks with WFTU militants from all continents for the past few years and we would like to help the younger militants with theoretical, ideological, trade union and trade union training seminars; not to make us the teachers but to help auxiliarily as the "logistics" in the army does.

21 – From Rome to Skyros?

Skyros is the place where I was born. Where my character was formed. There are my memories of childhood and youth. There is the grave of all my ancestors, my parents and my wife. I never forgot Skyros and my roots. I am attached to its people, to their lives and struggles, to their cultural traditions, customs and customs. I tried never to be absent from the events and needs of the island and was always in Skyros at the first opportunity. It happened that I was traveling from New Delhi, India to Athens and upon landing the plane in Athens directly from the airport I left for the island. And I even spoke, gave a speech to a gathering of islanders on the phone, while I was in South Africa.



Skyros, 2017

Esciros has given me back a thousand times the love I have for her and her people. I was very moved when in one of my speeches as a member of the Greek parliament I spoke about the demands of the breeders of Scyros and the hundreds of residents who had gathered to watch my speech on television lifted my mother in their arms, hugged her and kissed her. Such expressions of appreciation were not few.

One of the reasons I gave my last two speeches at the Congress in Rome in Greek was also because my compatriots on the island had asked me to do so and some friends there virtually saw my last farewell speech. Back from Rome I spent two days on the island and in a week I will be staying for two months. I feel strange to stay there for 60 days. My visits were always 5, 10 or 20 days maximum. The last time I spent two months on the island was in 1971, that is, 50 years ago!

My friends, family, and former schoolmates are preparing to organize what they say is the bottom line; they tell me that I have to give a report to them of what I have done all these years. And I know everyone is kind to me but strict. We all met "through thick and thin," as we often say in Greece. No one can deceive anyone.

My strictest judge in the 8 years I was a deputy was my mother. Two or three times a week he called me to complain about agricultural pensions, price increases, the cost of agricultural inputs, the need for the Ministry of Health to send a second rural doctor to the island, etc. Sadly, now that my son is in Skyros as a rural doctor, she has passed away.

On May 1, 1999, my father died at the age of 88. Before he died he asked me not to sell the 30 goats he had. My brothers and I have respected his wish. So now I have to take care of the goats in some way as well. My relatives are right to complain. They have been taking care of them for so many years, now it will be my turn! Even as an assistant...

So until September 4th I will be in Skyros; I will be in contact with other colleagues to prepare some international trade union seminars for trade union training free of charge; I will continue to practice sport shooting in the mountains of Skyros and in the fall I may apply again for a visa to the United States. I have an immigrant brother in the US, I have not seen him for many years and as we are getting older I would like to see him.

In conclusion, I am happy and fortunate to have the opportunity to be in my land more often. I feel fortunate to be alive even if by chance, as I could never have returned to my homeland if, for example, in 2012, the passengers of the plane that, after an explosion, had to make an emergency landing in Tehran had not been so lucky; or in 2003, when the Israeli army arrested me along with 8 other dear comrades and kept us standing in a stream with our hands up all night, pointing lasers at our heads; or even in 2007, if we had not avoided by chance the explosion of a paramilitary bomb in Bogotá, Colombia, because we arrived a few minutes late at a meeting place with leaders of the Colombian class movement, things would have been different. So for all these reasons I feel lucky, especially because on our side, in the struggles, some gave even life; from his death we learned that the revolutionary must be willing to sacrifice his life in the next minute for the struggle and at the same time plan and plan the struggles of the future as if he still had two more lives to live.

Read the first part of the interview with George Mavrikos:

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