

France: `Another Europe is possible`

Monday 24 March 2008, by [HEALY Sean](#) (Date first published: 17 January 2001).

The French seaside resort town of Nice, on the country's Mediterranean coast, added its name to the list of "insurgent cities" — a list which already includes Seattle, Washington, Prague and Melbourne — when, on December 6-7, 70,000 people from across Europe protested outside the European Union's Intergovernmental Conference.

The high-level summit, which brought together the heads of state and government from all 15 member-nations of the EU, convened to renegotiate the Treaty of Amsterdam, which sets down the structure of the union. Proposed changes aimed to shift decision-making powers within the EU even further in favour of its biggest powers: Britain, Germany, France, Italy and Spain.

Protest groups, including trade unions, left political parties and social movements, were also angered by the proposed European Charter of Fundamental Social Rights and planned changes to Article 133 of the Treaty of Amsterdam, which applies to international trade.

The charter falls short of the existing human rights situation in several countries and makes no mention of the right to a job, to social security, to strike, to housing or to a minimum income.

The proposed changes to Article 133, meanwhile, would take away EU member-nations' existing right to veto international trade agreements, such as those made within the World Trade Organisation, and would instead apply Qualified Majority Voting to trade issues, a voting system which favours Europe's main powers.

Opponents of the move likened it to US President Bill Clinton's failed attempt to get "fast-track" trade negotiation powers from Congress and said it would concentrate power in the hands of Europe's Trade Commissioner, Pascal Lamy, an aggressive neo-liberal.

On the first day of protesting, December 6, 70,000 people, mainly trade unionists from France, Italy and Spain, marched to support a call by the European Trade Union Confederation to ameliorate the worst affects of the treaty's renegotiation.

The march was one of the first occasions when the ETUC has organised a Europe-wide mobilisation. Some protesters got within 100 metres of the conference venue before being turned back by tear gas and police barricades.

While far smaller, protests on the second day, December 7, were more radical, in both their demands and their tactics.

Four thousand demonstrators, in three groups, again marched on the conference venue, launching several attempts to smash through police lines. Protesters chanted anti-capitalist slogans, including "Europe is not for sale" and "Another Europe is possible", and demanded the complete rejection of the proposed changes. Banks and businesses were daubed with graffiti, including the slogan "Death to money".

Another militant demonstration occurred at Nice's railway station, where hundreds of activists protested against the French government's refusal to allow a contingent of several thousand Italian

activists, from Ya Basta! and Rifundazione Comunista, into the country.

While protesters weren't able to shut down, or even disrupt, the summit proceedings, their actions seemed to have had some impact on the summit's final outcomes.

While the major changes to the EU's decision-making structure went through, Article 133 was only partially amended and the European Charter of Fundamental Human Rights was not formally added to the new Treaty of Nice, rendering it toothless.

P.S.

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