

Intervention at the Istanbul European Preparatory Assembly
Plenary session – September, the 24

First of all, I would like to take advantage of this particular place Istanbul, at this particular moment, to say that my trade-union, Snesup-FSU of France, has taken part in solidarity actions with the universities of the self-governing territory of Iraki Kurdistan, Dohuk, Erbil and Suleimanie for more than ten years.

I should like to give my own estimation of the present situation. The past two decades have seen the prevalence of neoconservative, neo capitalistic ideas : less state, less politics, economics over dominating, the implosion of the USSR “enough” as a demonstration. Unfortunately, it has never been just an ideological debate : concrete antisocial, Malthusian and segregating measures have been taken in many countries. In the field of education, we have experienced a recession of free education, free access, of the public welfare - public good.

However, recent events seem to be running against this trend : the vote in France, then in Netherlands on the project of European Treaty, the recent vote in Germany and last, the questions posed by the inability to cope with the devastations cause by a hurricane in the most powerful country in the world. All these events show that politics in its wider meaning is gathering strength, that the awareness that societies are governed by relations of forces, by human choices and not by the “hand of God”. The European Union has become less of an abstraction ; fatalism is receding, not only among militants and therefore the possibility of intervening reappears. The next ESF is therefore an opportunity to reinforce this trend.

I am now coming to the problems of science and research.

First, I think that not every body here knows – this is our own guilty –that we have created in London a network called ESSF (European Science Social Forum) which has its e-mail (essfnetwork@yahooogroups.com) and its site (www.essfnetwork.org) whose first aim was to provide a detailed analysis of the project of next framework programme of the European commission for research and technology (FP 7). We need to consider very seriously this FP 7. Its logic and priority lines are not innocent, not withstanding the way it was thought out. We find again the “Strategy of Lisbon” which, by playing on the meanings of “society”, “economics”, “knowledge”, actually makes the latter serve economic interests - that is multinational corporations – and not society interests. Here is the fundamental question : must science be used to answer human needs, human development, human emancipation I even dare to say, or must it be just an instrument of technological development ensuring the profits and domination of powerful companies and governments in/for an ever more unfair and dangerous world?

This question is too serious to be left in the hands of technocrats or experts, lobbyists and politicians far from people or scientists far from the scientific community : it concerns all citizens, all people and must be debated by them. Our ambition, as scientists, is to bring information –including contradictory ones – to feed the debates.

We think that the next ESF must go on along the track open in London and must devote more space to this question. But make it clear, it would not be to stay in a “ghetto” of “those in the know”. Linked to the initiatives of the Education network, there will be a seminar on Higher Education and Research, coping with access, statutes, personal problems, however my contribution here is intended to stress that research must be examined within its economic and social implications and therefore in its political ones. To day’s means and type of development, the “sharing” of the world will bring about enormous sociological, ideological and political changes, and finally huge consequences on concrete day life and life itself. Our “altermondialist” (I mean “for an alternative world order”) movement has been developed through an anti WTO, anti Davos movement and is symbolised by the cities of Seattle and Porto-Alegre : we cannot stop at a mere anticapitalistic denunciation, we must work on all the factors operating to day, that are shaping to morrow’s societies, human liberations or human tragedies. Considering the conversations I have just had with some NGOs, associations, trade-

unions of the ESSF network, I propose we work for Athens, at Athens and after Athens on the following topics –which anyway belong to the thematic areas defined in Prague and which we are finalizing here - :

- which research for which Europe?
- which research for which society?
- which research for which place of Europe in the world : a factor of peace and development or a new form of imperialism?

These questions are not to be debated in “ ghetto seminars “ for only the “experts” – I repeat it – they are not to be limited to the thematic area “ education, culture, medias “ but

Jean-Paul Lainé

member of the FSU delegation

international representative of the Snesup- Trade union of Higher Education in France