

Lionel Jospin and Trotskyism: the debate over the French prime minister's past

Peter Schwarz
27 June 2001

For three weeks, the French press has been full of revelations about the alleged Trotskyist past of Prime Minister Lionel Jospin.

It started when an interview was published in Paris's *Aujourd'hui* with Patrick Dierich, a former member of the *Organisation Communiste Internationaliste* (OCI, International Communist Organisation). The 56-year old astronomer, who was an OCI member from 1968 to 1986, told the paper that he knew Jospin in 1971 as a member of the party: "There's no mistake. It was during the summer of 1971. I was in the same party branch as him. He was Comrade 'Michel', and I was Comrade 'Blum'. We all used pseudonyms."

Dierich's claims are not new. Similar rumours have circulated since 1995, without there being any concrete proof up to now. Jospin always rejected these allegations, saying he was being mistaken for his brother Olivier, who had been a prominent member of the OCI into the 1980s.

The revelations made by Dierich were followed by an interview with another former OCI member, the now eighty-year-old Boris Fraenkel, which was published on the web site of the weekly magazine *Nouvel Observateur*. Fraenkel comes from a German Jewish family and was born in Danzig, in what was then East Prussia. He fled the Nazis to Switzerland, settling in France after the war, where he was a founding member of the Trotskyist OCI.

Fraenkel reported that he got to know Jospin in 1964 and taught him politics in his apartment for over a year. "Lionel Jospin came to see me regularly, to take part in a revolutionary studies group. This was the necessary training before joining the Trotskyist movement. As my comrades liked to say, my speciality was finding young left-wingers and catching them in my net. At that time, Jospin was studying at the *École Nationale D'administration* [ENA, the university for the French political elite]. I trained him in secret. A future top state official wouldn't want to be known as a revolutionary. Through our discussions we became friends."

As proof of his friendship with Jospin, Fraenkel tendered a postcard signed "Lionel", which the latter had sent him at that time while on vacation. In 1966, Fraenkel reported, he was expelled from the OCI and lost contact with Jospin. He presumes that the leader of the OCI, Pierre Lambert, continued to keep in contact with Jospin, but he cannot say for sure. Fraenkel was expelled from the OCI for championing the ideas of Wilhelm Reich and Herbert Marcuse, whose *Eros and Civilisation* he translated into French.

When asked about these recently published claims during parliamentary questions in the National Assembly, Jospin admitted for the first time that he actually had been connected with the Trotskyist movement. "It is true that in the 1960s I took an interest in Trotskyist ideas, and I established relations with one of the groups of this political movement," he said. "It was a personal, intellectual and political journey over which, if I may use the word, I have no reason to become redfaced."

Jospin said he had "made the acquaintance of some remarkable people through these contacts" and this had contributed to his development. He

had "nothing to regret and nothing to apologise for".

He had stressed on previous occasions that he was "a child of Suez and Budapest". This is an allusion to the invasion of Egypt by British and French troops (social democrat Guy Mollet was then premier of France) and the defeat of the Hungarian uprising by Soviet troops in 1956. Jospin was nineteen at the time.

One day later, Jospin went into more detail about his contacts with the OCI in an interview that was specially arranged with *Radio Europe 1*. He said he had come to know a "number of strong personalities there, combative workers, autodidacts, sometimes intellectuals". This was a "useful counterpoint—I could say, almost an antidote—to my outstanding education at the ENA". He made "experiences with radicalism" and acquired the ability to understand it "better than many others".

The newspaper *Le Monde* has also published a long article about "Lionel Jospin's Trotskyist past". The paper claims that in June 1971, Jospin joined the Socialist Party (PS) as a "mole", i.e., as a secret member of the OCI. *Le Monde* cites some ten witnesses who claim to have worked with Jospin from the summer of 1969 to the autumn of 1971 in an OCI local branch. Apart from Patrick Dierich and a certain Yvan Berrebi, the paper does not name any of these other witnesses.

Le Monde further maintains that Jospin was in close contact with the OCI throughout the 1970s and only broke off relations with OCI leader Pierre Lambert in 1987, six years after Jospin was elected first secretary of the Socialist Party. This is based on the assertions of two more anonymous witnesses, who claim to have worked as full-time party workers for the OCI in the 1970s. According to them, inside the OCI's Paris offices Lambert made no secret of his relations with Jospin. In April 1980 he boasted that he had helped Jospin prepare a television debate with Communist Party (CPF) leader Georges Marchais.

Attempts by *Le Monde* to find out more details from former leading members of the OCI failed. Pierre Lambert, now 84, has refused to make any statement. Daniel Gluckstein, national secretary of the *Parti des Travailleurs* (PT, Workers Party), the successor organisation to the OCI, said he was only prepared to speak about the Jospin of today: "The rest does not concern us. Jospin's past is his own problem, not ours." The historian Pierre Broué said he knew nothing. Charles Berg, secretary of the OCI's youth movement AJS at the beginning of the 1970s, and according to *Le Monde* responsible for the OCI's entryist work in the Socialist Party, refused to make any public statement.

However Berg, who was expelled from the OCI in 1979 and today works as a television producer under the name Jacques Kirsner, had already acknowledged in a 1999 article for *Libération* that the OCI enjoyed relations with Jospin: "For many years, we fought politically alongside Lionel Jospin and shared the same revolutionary, socialist and democratic convictions."

Asked on *Radio Europe 1* about the claims made in *Le Monde*, Jospin did not deny that there had been meetings and discussions. They were, however, of a "private character" and had not touched his "public and

open work in the Socialist Party.”

Questioned whether he had joined the Socialist Party (PS) in 1971 as a “mole” of the OCI, and when exactly he had ended his political and intellectual relations with the OCI, Jospin responded by saying he had joined the PS freely and had always acted freely in the Socialist Party. “Ever since I bore any responsibilities in the Socialist Party—that is, since 1973—I acted fully as a member of the Socialists. Everything else was based on contacts and discussions, which I might have perhaps had, but which were purely private and in no way public. Look at what I did between 1973 and 1981, and afterwards, as education minister and in other functions, and see if there was the slightest problem with that!”

Public reactions to Jospin’s confession were rather restrained. From his own camp, he received almost unanimous support. Some representatives of the opposition tried to utilise the affair politically, and reports emerged that in President Jacques Chirac’s office the history of the Trotskyist movement is being scrutinised for ammunition in the upcoming presidential election campaign. Jospin will probably be the Socialist Party candidate in 2002 against the Gaullist incumbent Chirac.

Jospin is not so much attacked for his contacts with the OCI as for having kept them secret so long. Contacts with radical groups in one’s youth are not unusual in France, where the radicalisation of the 1960s involved broad layers. Even the Gaullist Chirac has admitted publicly that he sold the Stalinist newspaper *l’Humanité* in his youth.

Jospin’s closest circle includes numerous functionaries who still belonged to radical organisations in the 1980s. For example, Jean Christophe Cambadélis, a parliamentary deputy for Paris and one of Jospin’s most important supporters inside the Socialist Party, was a member of the OCI central committee until 1986.

Jospin’s latest admissions about his radical past may have been made primarily for tactical reasons. By making them public now, he may be hoping to prevent his adversaries from using such revelations as ammunition in next year’s election campaign. But beyond such passing political considerations, Jospin’s connections with the OCI raise more fundamental questions. How is it that a man, who showed sympathies for Trotskyist ideas and possibly belonged to a section of the Fourth International at the age of 30, stands at the head of the French government 25 years later as a trusted representative of the bourgeoisie?

One can only speculate about Jospin’s personal motivations. Only he could provide information about the extent to which he actually supported Trotskyist ideals in his youth—something he obviously does not intend to do. There is, however, an obvious connection between Jospin’s career and the development of the OCI itself, which rapidly turned away from Trotskyist principles at the end of the 1960s, when Jospin was in close contact with the organisation. In 1971, the year Jospin joined the Socialist Party, the OCI broke organisationally with the International Committee the Fourth International, to which it had belonged up to then as the French section.

In 1971, the OCI pursued a political line that no longer had anything in common with Trotsky’s conceptions, but could easily be accommodated to the aims of Socialist Party leader François Mitterrand. It is indicative that both Patrick Dierich and Jospin himself assume Mitterrand was informed about Jospin’s contacts with the OCI and did not have any objections.

According to Dierich, Mitterrand “knew all about his [Jospin’s] dual membership. Don’t forget, he was a former interior minister! ... At that time, we were not of the opinion that the Communist Party stood closer to the workers than the Socialist Party. Moreover, from an electoral point of view, only a PS candidate could beat the right wing. Therefore, one had to help Mitterrand. Jospin did that in his own way. Objectively, the OCI was an ally of the Socialists.”

Mitterrand quickly favoured Jospin and by 1973 had already brought him into the national secretariat of the party. Jospin acknowledged on

Radio Europe 1 that his contact with the OCI did not pose any obstacle. Asked whether Mitterrand knew anything, he answered: “In my opinion, somebody must have whispered in his ear about it, but we certainly never spoke about it. I believe he was pleased by what I did.”

In June 1971, at the congress of Épinay, Mitterrand took over the leadership of the Socialist Party in a carefully prepared surprise move. In contrast to the old leadership under Guy Mollet, which had been in office since end of the war and was completely tied to the conceptions of the Cold War, Mitterrand advocated the unity of the left, “*l’union de la Gauche*”. By this he understood both a widening of the Socialist Party—at that time limping far behind the Communist Party with the voters—through the integration of republican and splintered socialist currents, and an alliance with the Communist Party, in which the Socialists would play the leading role.

In pursuing this course, Mitterrand was in no sense acting as a left-winger or committed socialist. An official under the pro-Nazi Vichy regime and a bourgeois minister in the Fourth Republic, he was a man of great political ambition but without great political convictions. This made him all the more adroit in exploiting the convictions of others—a sort of modern-day Joseph Fouché*. Already in 1965 he had stood against General de Gaulle as the common candidate of the left and achieved a considerable result—only to be politically marginalised again soon after.

The student revolt and the general strike of May-June 1968 gave new impetus to Mitterrand’s efforts to form a “Union of the Left”. The Fifth Republic was shaken to its foundations. President de Gaulle had temporarily lost control of the situation and was only able to maintain office with the aid of the Communist Party. The end of his rule seemed imminent.

The crisis of the regime was a consequence of social changes that had occurred. In the fifties and sixties, France underwent a remarkable economic boom that radically altered the balance between agriculture and industry, reducing the significance of the rural petty bourgeoisie who had long served as a conservative force in French politics. A young, militant working class had grown up in the suburbs of its cities. Owing to the damaged reputation of the Stalinists and the fragmentation of the Socialists, the militancy of these layers threatened to take a revolutionary course.

Under these conditions, the Union of the Left served to contain the movement by channelling it into calmer waters. Although Mitterrand’s past had bequeathed him a tarnished reputation, he was successful—with the help of the Union of the Left—in capturing the imagination of broad layers of workers. Enormous hopes and illusions were fostered in the Union of the Left during the seventies. When Mitterrand was finally elected president in 1981, hundreds of thousands danced in the streets—though not for long. Mitterrand was soon to thwart the hopes they had invested in him.

In 1971 the OCI played a decisive role in propping up the hopes and illusions roused by Mitterrand. It provided him with valuable and welcome support from the left.

Following de Gaulle’s resignation in April 1969, the OCI had elevated the demand for a common presidential candidate supported by the Socialist and Communist parties to the axis of its political strategy. It designated this policy a “united workers’ front”, expressly emphasising that it was not merely a tactical demand, but a central strategy. The OCI claimed that this strategy arose from the necessity to counterpose the working class, as an independent class, to the bourgeoisie, its state and its government. “The answer to the question of government power resolves itself into the question of the united workers’ front,” stated the OCI’s newspaper, *La Vérité* (No. 544, p. 10). “It is indispensable for the solution of the question of power and the state,” the article continued.

The claim that the election of a candidate supported by both Socialists and Stalinists would amount to bringing the working class to power was

nonsensical. For decades both parties had demonstrated their loyalty to the bourgeois state. But as a left fig leaf for Mitterrand's politics, the demand proved effective. When the left failed to produce a common candidate in 1969, the OCI denounced the PS and CPF for "destroying the class front of the proletariat". Michel Rocard's United Socialist Party (PSU) and Alain Krivine's Communist League, which had stood their own candidates, were also condemned by the OCI for "splitting the class front".

Mitterrand obviously appreciated support from this side. The OCI was not only promoting his ends; it could also supply him with useful political forces. Gérard Leclerc and Florence Muracciole, biographers of Jospin, describe the OCI of those days (then under the name, International Communist Party, PCI) as follows: "Given impetus by the events of May 1968, the PCI was in an upswing at the beginning of the seventies. It had almost 8,000 members and could mobilise tens of thousands more—above all, thanks to its youth organisation, the Alliance of Youth for Socialism (AJS)... It controlled the UNEF-ID, the most important student organisation, and was well established in numerous branches of the *Force Ouvrière* trade union... It was also very active in the teachers' trade union and even—although very discreetly—in the CGT [the Communist Party-controlled trade union]". (*Lionel Jospin, L'héritier Rebelle*", pp. 43-44)

In 1971 Mitterrand even appeared as principal speaker at a ceremony organised and stewarded by the OCI to mark the centenary of the Paris Commune.

When Jospin came into contact with the OCI in 1964, it was the French section of the International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI). The ICFI had been founded in 1953 to defend orthodox Trotskyism against Pabloism, an opportunistic tendency led by Michael Pablo and later by Ernest Mandel. The OCI's break from the ICFI and its support for Mitterrand severed the French working class from the programme of the Fourth International and thereby deprived it of any revolutionary alternative. This is one of the most important causes of the current crisis of the labour movement, which has proven unable to defend its social and political achievements despite repeated militant struggles. To understand this issue, a short digression into the history of the Fourth International is necessary.

The struggle against Pabloism revolved around the fundamental orientation of the programme of the Trotskyist movement.

When Leon Trotsky took the initiative of founding the Fourth International in the 1930s, he was drawing the consequences of the fact that both the Second (social democratic) and Third (communist) Internationals had hopelessly degenerated and had exhausted their potential as instruments for social progress. Social democracy had proved itself to be the loyal accomplice of the bourgeoisie ever since the first world war. The Communist International had been transformed into a tool of the Stalinist bureaucracy in Moscow, and was responsible for catastrophic defeats of the international labour movement. Particularly as a result of the defeat of the German proletariat—paralysed in the face of Hitler's takeover due to the disastrous policies of the German Communist Party (KPD)—Trotsky drew the conclusion that the Communist International was no longer of any use in the struggle for socialist revolution.

Henceforth, the crisis of leadership in the working class could be resolved only through the construction of new proletarian parties as sections of the Fourth International. "The Fourth International declares uncompromising war on the bureaucracies of the Second and Third, Amsterdam and Anarcho-syndicalist Internationals as on their centrist satellites... These organisations are not pledges of the future, but decayed survivals of the past," declared the founding programme of the Fourth International, published in 1938.

Pabloism repudiated this perspective. Impressed by the scale of nationalisations implemented by the Stalinist bureaucracy in countries

occupied by the Red Army after the Second World War, Pablo proclaimed that the Stalinist bureaucracy—under the pressure of objective events—was capable of reforming itself. The evolution towards socialism, for centuries, would take the form of "deformed workers' states" like those formed in Eastern Europe at the time. Accordingly, the task of the Fourth International no longer consisted in fighting the Stalinist parties, but of influencing them, of recognising progressive tendencies within their ranks or dissolving itself into the Stalinist parties completely.

Pabloism was later to apply this perspective to a variety of petit-bourgeois movements—Mao's peasant army, Fidel Castro's guerrillas, diverse national liberation movements and student movements of the 1960s. The tenor of the perspective was always the same: it was not the working class under its own, independent banner that was the bearer of the socialist revolution, but rather other social forces that would move to the left under the pressure of objective events.

The French Trotskyists split over this question. In 1952, the Pabloite minority expelled the orthodox Trotskyist majority with the backing of the International Secretariat controlled by Pablo. The majority, later to become the OCI, affiliated itself with the International Committee of the Fourth International in 1953. The minority remained with the revisionist International (later, the United) Secretariat. The Revolutionary Communist League (LCR), today led by Alan Krivine, developed out of this Pabloite minority. There was also a third tendency in France that claimed to be Trotskyist but had refused to join the Fourth International in 1938—today's *Lutte Ouvrière* (LO-Workers' Struggle) led by Arlette Laguiller. This party was strongly oriented toward syndicalism and viewed the international conflict over program and principles with contempt.

In the mid-1960s, the OCI placed a question mark over the International Committee's fight against Pabloism. Initially, this manifested itself in its claim that the Fourth International had become moribund: that it had been destroyed by Pabloism and had to be rebuilt.

The Socialist Labour League (SLL), the British section of the International Committee, vehemently opposed this contention. In 1967 it wrote to the OCI: "The future of the Fourth International is represented in the stored-up hatred and experience of millions of workers for the Stalinists and reformists who betray their struggles. The Fourth International must consciously fight for leadership to meet this need... Only this struggle against revisionism can prepare the cadres to take the leadership of the millions of workers drawn into the struggle against capitalism and against the bureaucracy... the living struggle against Pabloism and the training of cadres and parties on the basis of this struggle was the life of the Fourth International in the years since 1952." (*Trotskyism versus Revisionism*, vol. 5, London 1975, pp. 107-114)

On the eve of the great class struggles of 1968, the SLL also warned about the consequences of the OCI's sceptical standpoint: "Now the radicalisation of workers in western Europe is proceeding rapidly, particularly in France... There is *always* a danger at such a stage of development that a revolutionary party responds to the situation in the working class not in a revolutionary way, but by an adaptation to the level of struggle to which the workers are restricted by their own experience under the old leadership—i.e., to the inevitable initial confusion. Such revisions of the fight for the independent party and the Transitional Programme are usually dressed up in the disguise of getting closer to the working class, unity of all those in struggle, not posing ultimatums, abandoning dogmatism, etc." (*ibid.*, pp. 113-114)

This warning went unheard. The revolts of 1968 propelled thousands of new, inexperienced members into the ranks of the OCI and its youth organisation (AJS), and the OCI leadership adapted itself to their state of confusion. The demand for a "united class front"—also criticised by the SLL in 1967—now became a formula with which the OCI adapted itself to the social democratic bureaucracy and led the newly won forces back to

the old bureaucratic apparatuses.

There was no longer any fundamental difference between the views of the OCI and those of the Pabloites. The only difference was that the OCI oriented itself towards social democracy—its enmity toward Stalinism increasingly adapting itself to the anti-communism of social democracy—while the Pabloites maintained their orientation towards the Stalinist parties.

In the seventies, the OCI developed into an important reservoir for youthful recruits to the social democratic bureaucracy. Lionel Jospin is only one of many functionaries who went through the OCI school. According to Henri Weber, who made his way from the Pabloite youth movement LCR to the right wing of the Socialist Party, there are “hundreds of old Trotskyists in the Socialist Party. This is a classical career. You could make a club out of them.” Making an amalgam between orthodox Trotskyists and pseudo-Trotskyists of the Pabloite and OCI variety, he went on to say that Trotskyism was an “excellent school for education”.

Marisol Touraine, a supporter of Jospin, commented on the claim that Jospin went into the Socialist Party as an agent of the OCI with the words: “What is the point of entryism, when in the end everyone ends up a social democrat?”

The OCI also spread its influence through the trade union bureaucracy. In particular, it had close connections with the leadership of *Force Ouvrière* (FO), the right-wing splitoff that emerged from the Stalinist-dominated CGT. Numerous members of the leadership of the OCI held full-time offices in the apparatus of the FO. Pierre Lambert, the OCI leader, was for a long time a close advisor of André Bergeron, the FO chairman, and Marc Blondel, Bergeron’s successor, is reputed to have owed his post to the support of the OCI.

At the end of the 1980s, the OCI severed itself from the Socialist Party to some extent and cropped up again under the name *Parti des Travailleurs* (PT-Workers’ Party). But this did not constitute a return to an orthodox Trotskyist line. The PT is a gathering point for right-wing social democratic bureaucrats who have fallen out with the Socialist Party for one reason or another or have failed to obtain coveted posts.

The consequences of the OCI’s politics have been devastating for the working class. During Mitterrand’s fourteen years in power, at first within the Union of the Left and then in cohabitation with the right, the social gains of the working class were systematically dismantled, under conditions in which the workers lacked a political alternative. In the end Mitterrand paved the way for the return to power of the Gaullists.

In the wake of the mass strike movement in the autumn of 1996, Jospin was, to the surprise of the French political establishment and the media, elected prime minister in 1997. But despite occasional left-wing rhetoric, his economic and social policies have basically mirrored those of his conservative predecessor.

Since coming to power Jospin’s “government of the left majority” has largely exhausted the trust invested in it. The Communist Party, in particular, is on the wane. This party, which in its heyday won over 20 percent of the vote, now fluctuates between seven and eight percent and has been overtaken by the Greens.

The current debate about Trotskyism in the French press—accompanied by numerous articles concerning the history of Trotskyism—is intimately bound up with current French politics. In view of the crisis of the Jospin government, the bourgeoisie is on the lookout for new support from the left and is hoping to find it in the “Trotskyists” of Krivine’s LCR and Laguiller’s *Lutte Ouvrière*. Based on its experience with the OCI, it will hardly be disappointed with the original Pabloite organisation, which by 1953 had already broken with the perspective of the Fourth International. While *Lutte Ouvrière* clings closely to the trade unions, the LCR is eagerly awaiting an offer for collaboration from the Communist Party.

Neither party has a perspective to offer the working class. For such a

perspective, it will be necessary to construct a section of the world party the OCI turned its back on in 1971: the International Committee of the Fourth International.

* Joseph Fouché—a Jacobin and advocate of the harshest measures during the Terror against the old aristocracy and royalists, later chief organizer of the right-wing coup of Thermidor which overthrew the Jacobin dictatorship, he became chief of the national police under the bourgeois Directory (1794-1799), and went on to serve Napoleon Bonaparte’s imperial regime in a similar capacity. Fouché became a synonym for the ultimate political survivor, one who combines ruthlessness, unscrupulousness and complete lack of principle.



To contact the WSWWS and the Socialist Equality Party visit:

wsws.org/contact