

Interview with a member of the Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire of France, and comment by David Walsh

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Francis Dollé

We post below an interview conducted May 4 with a member of the French Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire (LCR) in Amiens, an industrial city 85 miles north of Paris. Reporters from the WSWS spoke with the LCR's Francis Dollé as part of an intervention into the political crisis in France produced by the first round of the presidential election. The interview is followed by a brief comment.

The April 21 balloting saw ultra-right candidate Jean-Marie Le Pen of the National Front finish second, with nearly 17 percent of the vote, to the Gaullist candidate and incumbent president, Jacques Chirac. Le Pen finished ahead of Socialist Party (SP) Prime Minister and presidential candidate Lionel Jospin, knocking the latter out of the second round of the election and delivering a shock to the French political and media establishment.

After the first round results were announced, tens of thousands of young people, in particular, responded to the presence in the May 5 runoff election of Le Pen, whose party is virulently chauvinist and anti-immigrant, by pouring into the streets. On May Day, 2 million people demonstrated in French cities and towns against the extreme right and its policies.

As soon as the protests erupted, the governmental left parties (the Plural Left)—the SP, the Communist Party (CP) and the Greens—as well as various protest movements and major sections of the media, mounted an intensive campaign to channel the anti-fascist opposition in a pro-Chirac direction, proclaiming that there was no choice but to vote for the reactionary and discredited incumbent.

Elections of deputies to the National Assembly will take place in two rounds June 9 and 16; any candidate who receives 12.5 percent of the vote in the first round may advance to the second. Chirac, the favored candidate of French big business, has appointed a right-of-center interim government, under the new prime minister, Jean-Pierre Raffarin, and is hoping to translate his victory in the presidential election into a right-wing majority in parliament.

The LCR, headed by Alain Krivine, is one of the organizations on the so-called “far left” of French politics. The LCR, Lutte Ouvrière (LO) and the Parti des Travailleurs (PT), all of which call themselves “Trotskyist,” ran candidates in the first round of the presidential election, winning a combined total of some 3 million votes—nearly 10 percent of the ballots

cast. The LCR ran its own candidate for the first time in decades. Olivier Besancenot, the LCR candidate, received 1.2 million votes. The explosive political conjuncture produced by the first round results, both Le Pen's electoral success and the relatively large size of its own vote, threw the LCR into crisis.

WSWS: What do you think of the LCR line on the presidential runoff May 5 between Chirac and Le Pen?

Dollé: Admittedly, it's a bit ambiguous. Anyway, we're not to call for a vote for Chirac. The debate inside the LCR is not decided either way. Some say vote Chirac because he's the only barrier to Le Pen. As for me, personally, I won't vote Chirac. The Plural Left called for a vote for Chirac. We didn't do that, all the same. We didn't call for a vote for Chirac.

WSWS: The impression people get nevertheless is that the LCR has called for a vote for Chirac. I quote from an LCR leaflet: “We must stop Le Pen in the streets and in the ballot box.” Isn't that a call to vote Chirac?

Dollé: I find it hard to answer that, because, indeed, that's the debate that's going on in the LCR right now. And we can't agree. My wife is in the LCR. We're arguing every day, because she says to me: “I'm going to dirty my hands voting, on your behalf, for Chirac.” I don't accept that argument. My not voting doesn't mean she'll be dirtying her hands instead of me and that it will be thanks to her Le Pen won't get in.

I agree with your document [No to Chirac and Le Pen! For a working class boycott of the French election: An open letter to Lutte Ouvrière, Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire, and Parti des Travailleurs] on this: Le Pen has not such an enormous following as all that. True, it is not nothing, but it's far from being a majority. I think he won't get in anyway. Even if he did, I think the French people as they are now would react. True, a section of the working class did vote for Le Pen. As soon as we take a proper look you can see the working class lacks political education, political understanding. The left has neglected training and education for decades.

WSWS: Isn't the task of a revolutionary party exactly this: to educate the working class? Is the LCR afraid that by calling for a boycott it will create a distance between itself and the population?

Dollé: Unlike LO, the LCR hasn't run in elections. The LCR has been present in all the struggles at the grassroots level. We're active at that level, we give out information.

The left always said, “When we get to power, we'll change the constitution.” Mitterrand came to power and he never touched it. He acted like the monarch of the republic. Now even the CP puts forward arguments which fully accept De Gaulle's constitution.

WSWS: Three million people voted for the LCR, LO and the PT.

Dollé: We do not call for a vote for Chirac. We are meeting up

tomorrow as soon as the result is out, at 9.30 p.m. We are not bothered about the election result. We know, fine, that Le Pen won't get in. We're already calling on people to get together on the street.

True enough, the legislative elections are too quickly on us. Since last week, in fact, over 100 people have come to ask to join the LCR. We have to make the first contact with these people and they are not necessarily revolutionaries. They are people who are fed up with the Socialist Party (SP) and the CP and want to fight for their pensions, etc.

WSWS: The youth want to fight fascism. Straight away the Plural Left channeled this movement towards Jospin's politics. They used Le Pen as a bogeyman to avoid making a critique of the Plural Left government and any discussion on perspectives. The LCR does not say, "Let us reject the system which opened the way for Le Pen." There is a difference between an individual abstention and a clear call to boycott these elections, which are a farce. An aggressive campaign would call forth a response from the working class.

Dollé: I accept the criticisms and the remarks. But right from the start, Monday morning [April 22], we were on the demonstrations. The high school students told us, "We don't want you lot, the political parties." It's not easy. The CP and the SP are making no analysis of what happened. Right from Monday morning, by calling for a vote for Chirac they put a stop to all discussion and political analysis. I place absolutely no confidence in the CP. They should never have participated in the government. I heard [CP Minister of Transport Jean-Claude] Gayssot defending Air France's opening up to capital. You can't put any trust in them any more. They'll never recover from this.

For me, there's no way there can be an alliance with the Plural Left for the legislative elections. The Socialists are still defending the "positive record" of the Plural Left. They are liars. They can't be trusted.

On Saturday, on the demonstration, the LCR had a fine contingent. We tried to express plenty of fighting slogans for the demands of the workers. We didn't just want to demonstrate against Le Pen. All governments which function in that way, the united right and left, never do any good. It's centrist politics. You can't govern like that.

The legislative elections being so close bothers us. Our relationship with LO is not very good. We're due to meet them on Tuesday. The legislative elections are there to get over a message. It's going to be a very short campaign, we haven't got the same resources as the others. It's tricky, there's the chance to speak out, but at the same time a very rapid partitioning off, a polemic with the media. It's not easy. I'm worried about the ambiguity of the SP and the CP and the place they still have in French society.

WSWS: They've already started, with their campaign against Le Pen.

Dollé: Every time I say I'm not going to vote Chirac I get criticised.

WSWS: The task of the revolutionary party is to tell the truth, whether people like it or not. We have to develop the class consciousness of the working class, fight confusion. That was Trotsky's method. We have to know how to take up positions that are not popular. It's not a question of personal courage, but of perspective.

Dollé: I tell my comrades in the LCR that we react in the short term. We don't talk about the other countries. There's no long-term view. The SP and the CP will do everything to avoid that. I know that's how it's going to be for the legislative elections. And what is more, I'm going to be a candidate!

WSWS: The young people are thirsty to understand the lessons of history. This must be used to construct a socialist perspective.

Dollé: There are people who criticise us for not coming to an agreement with the Plural Left. It's a joke.

WSWS: In the *Figaro* they said that [LCR leader Alain] Krivine had agreed to meet with the SP. If Krivine had called for a boycott it would have had an enormous impact.

Dollé: I haven't been in the LCR for long. It looks as if the LCR didn't

manage to deal with the problem, to react and deal with the problem in an aggressive and clear manner. That's true. In Amiens since last week we haven't managed to meet. I was aware that there were positions which weren't always too clear, sometimes too syndicalist. At the same time there are lots of people coming to join. The leadership of the LCR has not been able to get a grip on the situation. It has meant we haven't been able to see our way more clearly. I agree the LCR's position is not clear. We are going to have to make an analysis which goes beyond the short term.

WSWS: The danger is that the LCR will take part in a new "Popular Front" trap for the working class.

The Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire belongs to the United Secretariat, which, in the early 1950s under the leadership of Michel Pablo, Ernest Mandel and Pierre Frank, abandoned the struggle to build the world party of socialist revolution, the Fourth International, and politically subordinated itself to Stalinism, social democracy and bourgeois nationalism.

Tested by the events of late April and early May, the radical phrase-mongering of the LCR proved to be entirely hollow. The organization, far from defending the political independence of the working class, lined up behind the pro-Chirac camp in the second round of the presidential election. It revealed itself to be a "left" party of the existing social and political order. Its battle cry was "May 5, let's vote against Le Pen," which, in the context of an election with only two candidates, amounted to an endorsement of Chirac. Indeed, Besancenot, the party's presidential candidate, announced that he was voting for the incumbent president.

The LCR has long occupied a place on the left wing of official political life in France. It is tied to the governmental left by a thousand threads, although it criticizes the social democrats and Stalinists to maintain its credibility with more radicalized layers. LCR leader Alain Krivine told *Le Figaro* April 30 in an interview that the CP and Greens had invited his party to a meeting, an invitation "which it naturally accepted," to discuss the possibility of political collaboration at some level.

The LCR is active in a variety of protest and radical organizations, which receive the official or unofficial support of the SP and CP. Christophe Aguiton, for example, a member of the LCR's political bureau, was a founding member of Attac, the anti-globalization movement, which received the endorsement of Jospin. The LCR has also been active in organizations like SOS Racisme, Ras l'front, the "Sans papiers" movement and others. Virtually all of these movements and their largely middle-class supporters supported Chirac in the May 5 vote.

The left establishment that sought to defend itself and the French status quo by rallying behind Chirac in the second round of the presidential election includes the LCR, as its "far left" flank. The Krivine group felt this pressure very strongly, and was organically incapable of breaking its ties with this thoroughly corrupt and anti-revolutionary milieu.

The LCR is being groomed and it is grooming itself to take part in a new political alignment to the left of the discredited SP and CP, which is to serve as another trap for the working class and the youth. Krivine has described this proposed regroupment as "a new feminist, ecological, anti-capitalistic party, which is not limited to the present extreme left."

The discussion with Francis Dollé provides some insight into the means by which left groups like the LCR arrive at and carry out centrist and opportunist policies. He describes a party internally divided, in considerable disarray and, above all, unprepared for the political responsibilities confronting it in the wake of the April 21 vote. Whether Dollé is fully aware of it or not, his comment, "The leadership of the LCR has not been able to get a grip on the situation," is an indictment of the organization.

While acknowledging the LCR's lack of a serious political analysis and clear, principled political line, Dollé points to the party's militant participation in various demonstrations and its calls for mass protest, as

though these were positive features that somehow offset the organization's political failings. This sort of protest politics is typical of the organization's particular brand of opportunism. For decades the LCR has masked its adaptation to the labor bureaucracies and leftist bourgeois currents behind a smokescreen of "mass action."

The intra-party situation Dollé describes is a textbook example of the fate of a centrist movement caught up in big events. Such a party does not orient itself in a politically coherent and principled fashion, basing itself on the interests of the working class and the history of the international Marxist movement. On the contrary, it is operated *upon*, steered in an opportunist direction by powerful class forces. Confusion and unpreparedness become the subjective manifestations of an objective political trajectory. In and through the internal disarray and evasion of principled political issues, the organization is conditioned to capitulate to the dominant current of official public opinion, in this case—the pro-Chirac camp.

Without intending to, Dollé confirms from the inside, so to speak, the fact that the LCR does not take itself seriously as a revolutionary organization. When confronted with the task of providing political leadership to the working class, under conditions where the party has received more than one million votes, the LCR ducks and dodges, and, in the end, capitulates. This capitulation, however, has been prepared by the entire history of the organization. The LCR has always rejected the historical responsibility of the Fourth International to provide revolutionary leadership to the working class, instead assigning that role to other, anti-Marxist forces.



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