

Robert Hue and the putrescence of French Stalinism

A comment on Hue's interview with the WSWS

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Confronted with Robert Hue, it is difficult to imagine that this man heads a party that has played such a pivotal role in French history in the twentieth century. His answers to the questions put to him by the WSWS are a mixture of complacent narrow-mindedness and evasion. He gives the impression of being a bookkeeper or receiver for a bankrupt company, rather than the leader of a party with a decades-long tradition.

In fact, Hue is in the process of presiding over the liquidation of a party that has undergone an enormous decline. The French Communist Party (PCF) became a Stalinist party in the 1920s and its political line has been counterrevolutionary since the early 1930s. It was thoroughly compromised by its support for the Moscow Trials and Stalin's terror in the USSR in the late 1930s. In the post-war period it has consistently defended French capitalism.

At the same time, during much of this period the PCF had a mass working class base, including tens of thousands of socialist-minded militants. It also held great sway in the French and European intelligentsia.

In the first elections held in France after World War II, the French Communist Party emerged as the strongest single party, with 26 percent of the vote. Even into the 1960s and 1970s the party regularly registered a vote of over 20 percent in national elections.

In the first round of this year's presidential elections, on the other hand, the party received just 3.4 percent. In the first round of the parliamentary elections it received 4.8 percent. Even in comparison with the presidential election of 1995 and the parliamentary vote of 1997, the party has lost half its electorate.

The main factor in this precipitate decline is the party's own Stalinist policies. Despite calling itself

"communist", the PCF has been an opponent of revolution for 70 years and, throughout the post-war era, a pillar of the French state.

On three occasions—1936, 1945 and 1968—the party assured the survival of bourgeois institutions under conditions of profound social crisis. With brief interruptions, the party has been a regular partner in government since 1981. The PCF's participation for years in a "left" government that was neither willing nor able to implement serious social reforms stripped the party of its last vestiges of credibility in the eyes of the working class.

Hue's claim that Socialist Party (SP) leader Lionel Jospin lost because workers had not understood the policies of the Plural Left government recalls the famous quote by the German dramatist Bertolt Brecht, who ironically suggested that the time had come for the government to elect a new people. The truth is the opposite of what Hue maintains. After fourteen years of a Communist Party-backed government headed by SP leader François Mitterrand, and five years of SP-PCF rule presided over by Jospin, workers have seen through the policies of the official left and are no longer prepared to support the traditional left parties.

Hue's claim that the PCF strove to implement alternative policies as coalition partner with the Socialists in the last government is derisory. Since first entering a Socialist government in 1981, PCF ministers have loyally defended the official government line. Hue seems to think that it is possible with a few phrases to sweep aside experiences made by millions over the course of decades.

His superficial approach to historical questions becomes clear when he professes that he has "no

opinion” on Trotsky. Either he is lying, or he has no notion of the history of his own party, which developed in a struggle against the Marxist opposition to Stalinism, which was led by Leon Trotsky.

Despite the deplorable shape of his own party, he does not feel the slightest inclination to pause and reflect on what has taken place. Instead he announces a “great future” for the PCF—as the administrator of “difficult areas and housing estates.”

His submissive attitude to official bourgeois politics is made clear when he accuses Chirac of behaving in a “partisan” manner in the elections, despite having been re-elected as the “representative of Republican principles.” What else did Hue expect from the leader of the Gaullists? Whoever relies on the “fairness” of the ruling class, rather than the independent mobilization of the working class, can only end up in a political morass.

Although it suits Hue to declare his hostility to Stalinism, he is a typical product of Stalinism. He personifies the contempt for principles, the readiness to adapt to every twist and turn of the ruling class, and the cynical attitude to the working class introduced into the communist movement by Stalin.

His criticisms of what he terms “Stalinism” are typical of this type of latter-day Communist Party official. He repudiates some of the most obvious and repulsive abuses of Stalinism, while refusing to discuss the more fundamental roots of Stalinist policy: its repudiation of the Marxist program of world socialist revolution, its nationalist orientation, its rejection of the principle of the political independence of the working class. All of these basic historical and political issues are raised at the most conscious level in the struggle and critique of Trotsky and the Fourth International against Stalinism. That is why Hue wants to evade the issue of Trotsky, while repeating the old Stalinist canard that Trotskyism is a form of “ultra-leftism”.

His agreement with the political essence of Stalinism becomes apparent when he accuses the “Trotskyists in France” of being too “extreme” and unwilling “to participate in institutions”. As we have explained in other articles, the organisations to which he refers call themselves Trotskyist, but long ago abandoned the program and principles for which Trotsky fought. The weakness of such parties is not their reluctance to adapt to bourgeois institutions, but quite the opposite—their

willingness to adapt themselves to the needs of official French politics.

Hue reaches the high point of cynicism when he defends his racist campaign in Montigny as a measure against the establishment of ghettos. Virtually every racist and xenophobe defends his demand for a halt to immigration with the argument that this is a contribution to the social integration of immigrants already in the country.

From the standpoint of the working class, there is nothing to mourn in the decline of the PCF. Its decades-long influence has had the most destructive impact on the political consciousness of the French working class, and effectively undermined the workers movement. The disintegration of the PCF clears from the path of the working class a major obstacle to the development of a genuinely socialist and internationalist mass political party. However, for this urgent task to be achieved, the most thoughtful and determined workers, students and intellectuals must strive to assimilate the great political lessons of the experiences of the international working class in the twentieth century, above all, the struggle for Marxism waged by Trotsky and the Fourth International against Stalinism.



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