

Residents of French CP leader's constituency speak to the WSWS

A reporting team
15 June 2002

Following the interview with Communist Party General Secretary Robert Hue, WSWS reporters spoke to residents of Argenteuil about the economic and political conditions in the area.

The WSWS spoke with Ali Romdhane, a member of the Socialist Party constituency committee and former Argenteuil town councillor.

WSWS: Can you tell us about this area?

Ali Romdhane: Le quartier des Musiciens is an area of the Val Nord housing estate that has 17,000 inhabitants. The unemployment rate, 17 to 18 percent, is higher than the national average. That's because it's a deprived working class area. It's because there are a lot of immigrant people, from Africa and North Africa, mainly.

This town was administered for a long time by the Communist Party. Quite recently it has been a mixed administration of the "Plural Left"—the Communists, the Socialists and the Greens. That was until March last year, 2001, when we lost the elections. Now the town of Argenteuil has a right-wing administration.

The Communist Party had run the town previously for sixty years. Even in coalition with the Plural Left, the Communist Party had been the dominant party.

Val Nord generally votes left. What may seem paradoxical is that this area, which is deprived, is the area that gives the least votes to the far right. The reason is that there have always been in this area thriving and active community associations—cultural, sports, educational, assistance to kids with learning difficulties.

WSWS: How is it that, according to reports, many Communist Party members voted Le Pen?

AR: There are several reasons. It's not true of this area, but in Argenteuil in general Le Pen and Mégret got practically 22 percent. Le Pen came in first here in

the first round. It's because, indeed, there is insecurity, but also there is the hysteria about insecurity, which had a big effect. There is also unemployment, at a level, mind you, above the national average. There is also a large immigrant population, mainly from the Magreb [northwest Africa].

I think it's these factors that have created the conditions for the tendency to vote Le Pen. It's more or less what's happening in all the European countries—it's not peculiar to France.

The Socialist Party is not putting up a candidate here. If the left vote is split, there's a risk of not getting 12.5 percent of the electorate and thus of not getting into the second round and letting Le Pen in again.

The WSWS also spoke with Zam Zamy, in the café on the Dalle, Val Nord, Argenteuil.

WSWS: What do you think about the coming elections?

Zam Zamy: Frankly, I don't think anything at all about it, as politics does not bring us anything good. So I don't think any more about politics.

The political system is not designed for thinking about us, the people. With all the respect they owe us, we are used as consumption, and we are consumed and discarded—that's what I find about the political movement. Because politics is economic now, it's no longer... As long as there's no philosophy for us, so we could be in a better-off situation, not well-off, but decent. Then perhaps it would be of interest. As long as it's just for business, there's no point bothering about it.

WSWS: Why do you think so many people voted Le Pen?

ZZ: A difficult question. Perhaps it's linked to just that, to the fact that the politicians have brought us nothing good. In their decadence, perhaps, the people

thought that it was the fault of the immigrants. It's all to do with politics, the way it's used. I think people are fed up with the fact that for fifty years they've always had the same thing over and over, which maybe is getting worse still.

WSWS: What are the social conditions like in this area?

ZZ: Your question is nice, but a bit complex. I see it in one way and others see it in another way, and I personally think that this area is generally a good town. It's the people who live in it who give it its day-to-day atmosphere. As far as the standard of living is concerned, it always comes back to the same thing. We have an area where the standard of living is pretty decent.

There's nothing interesting any more. We can't travel like the old people did, frontiers have been put up everywhere. As soon as you have to pay, I think we are imprisoned. If you haven't got any money, it's a prison all round you. You can't move around. Barriers are always being put up against you. Dictatorship is global, nothing changes.

WSWS: What do you think should be done?

ZZ: Get rid of the dictatorship that is always giving to the rich. Give us the power to lead our lives. Perhaps there are homeless people who've got the answer. The people aren't given their say. The people should participate a lot as far as concerns our life.

WSWS: Why do you think the left lost in Argenteuil?

ZZ: The left opened things up a bit, but at the same time they put us back a bit. I noticed that during the time of Giscard [d'Estaing, French president 1974-81], I was little, but in the way of business, the black market, we could all get by. And when the left got in there was no way out, in fact.

And the right, I don't know if it'll do any better. I don't think it'll contribute to that, but at least, I think, they'll end up thinking about us as far as concerns respect, as far as concerns life, so we can all eat. Because the most important thing today in politics is to try to make a society. Society does not exist, in fact. People don't help each other, nobody takes notice of others.

All we get is negative things and we are going right down into hell. We don't want an American type society: 40 percent rich and 60 percent below the line. They are almost buried alive—the greatest hypocrites on

the planet.

I think that the whole world, our world—all of us—with all the faults of the right, and all the qualities which we have on the left, we can do something worthwhile.

Of course, in Africa there are rich and poor. In Africa, the Europeans brought us wealth and poverty. Before, African ways didn't work like that. With us it was barter, it was what we had around us, agriculture, animals, that's all; it wasn't pieces of paper, getting, having blocks of flats. It's not the same outlook.

WSWS: Our position is that one nation should not lead, but that the oppressed people, the working class all over the world, should unite.

ZZ: I agree with you, but for me, whether it be the working class or the rich does not matter. In fact, everyone should unite. Well, OK, people are rich and only think of themselves is one point, but the rich have got the time to think, perhaps, so as to improve our lives. We don't have time because we're always taken up with paying the rent, paying our taxes. We are taxed like mad. The aim is, if you'll excuse the expression, to put us in the shit, so we won't have time to think about the men who run our lives.

My job is to prepare orders in the organisation of groceries. It's not well paid—with the euro, the cost of living has gone up by a third. I reckon 7,000 francs is useless, just the official minimum, if you're working just for one person, as the cost of living has risen so much.

My little wage, nine to nine and a half thousand gross—just enough for me to get by. Now, if you've got kids... If you want to get on, set up a business, they won't let you go into business. They're always putting a spanner in the works, because tomorrow you might become a multinational. As we all say, perhaps, by the grace of God, perhaps one day things will get better. A good idea will come to you and you'll have made the savings necessary to manage to set up a business. It's fate. The rest we can't know.



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