

An interview with Olivier Besancenot, candidate of the Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire

David Walsh in Paris
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WSWS reporters spoke to Olivier Besancenot, the Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire's presidential candidate in April and a candidate for the National Assembly in the current legislative election, prior to a June 5 election meeting in north-eastern Paris. [See "The French Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire defends its opportunism"]

David Walsh: How do you see the present election campaign? How do you see the situation developing after June 16?

Olivier Besancenot: I think that there will be a new political situation, a contest between the National Front and the extreme right, on the one side, and the social movements, on the other. And today, in order to resist the extreme right and the right, there is a new relationship of forces on the left, between the left that was in the government, which proposes to pursue the same kind of politics, and a far left which has become stronger, which won more than 10 percent of the vote in the last election, whether with Arlette Laguiller [of Lutte Ouvrière], or with my campaign.

That is to say, a ballot for the far left has become a useful vote for the working people. This is something that is going to continue on the electoral level, this political radicalization. And on the other hand, there is a social radicalization that is going to continue. With the new anti-globalization mobilization. A mobilization in the work places, as much in the public sector as in the private.

DW: And after June 16 what is going to happen?

OB: No matter what the government does, there will be mobilizations. Whether it's a government of the right or a government of the left, there will be big struggles to try to save the pension system, where they

are proposing—be it the right or the extreme right, but also the official left—to turn over the money from workers' contributions to private speculators, the insurance companies or the banks.

DW: What is your attitude toward the crisis of the Communist Party?

OB: The crisis in the Communist Party will continue. There are many Communist Party militants who are having discussions today with the far left organizations, and the social movements. In any case, they are paying for the policies they carried out while in the government. They propose to continue the same thing with the Socialist Party. The Socialist Party leadership has succeeded in putting them in orbit around the idea that capitalism is an unsurpassable horizon. I think this disgusts, this revolts more and more Communist Party members and voters.

DW: What is the relevance, the significance of Trotskyism today?

OB: I believe that it's a political heritage, first of all, which permits the LCR to be a revolutionary organization, an organization which proposes to all those who want to change the world in a radical and revolutionary fashion to construct this organization with a heritage of an analysis of what was Stalinism, which permits us to say today that our communism has always been opposed to Stalinism. Not simply in the past, but also in the future. In relation to democratic control, in relation to our organization of mobilizations, of movements themselves. So I think that, first of all, it's that.

DW: How does the LCR foresee the emergence of a revolutionary crisis?

OB: This is always difficult to foresee. In any case,

we are trying to prepare for mobilizations the equivalent of those that took place in the winter of 1995 in France, when there was a huge mobilization, especially in the public sector, among government workers [rail, postal, civil service]. But what has changed since 1995 is that today in the private sector there have been recent strikes against layoffs, for wages, by workers at Moulinex, Danone, Michelin. And if there is an equivalent this fall, after the return to school, of December 1995, there would be a coming together of the private and the public, in other words, the possibility of a real general strike today, perhaps the equivalent of May 1968.

DW: Did the LCR consider calling for an active boycott of the second round of the presidential election? And why did it reject such an idea?

OB: We called for a vote against [extreme right-wing candidate Jean-Marie] Le Pen.

DW: Did you consider the idea of a boycott?

OB: Of an abstention?

DW: No, of an active boycott, of an active campaign, of the LCR and Lutte Ouvrière, for example.

OB: No, we decided to create a roadblock to the extreme right, in the street as well as at the ballot box, explaining that we understood those who were voting for Chirac, like we understood those who were not voting for Chirac. Because for us Chirac could not be any kind of rampart against fascism. But we could not put Chirac and Le Pen in the same basket.

DW: Do you think it would have been difficult to fight for this idea [of a boycott] in the population?

OB: I think it would have been difficult because there was a very strong pressure. A pressure from the movement of the youth who thought that you had to vote for Jacques Chirac. We explained to them that we understood what they were doing, but for us Jacques Chirac was no rampart [against fascism]. So, it was very complicated. There was a very strong pressure. Many people were horrified to see Le Pen in the second round. Under those conditions it was very difficult to bring in a political orientation.

DW: You mean the movement in defense of undocumented workers, Attac, SOS-racisme, those sorts of movements?

OB: Yes, those. Even the union organizations were overwhelmingly for going farther and in terms of

giving an endorsement. They called for a vote for Jacques Chirac.

DW: Did you consider resisting this pressure?

OB: Yes, but that's what we did. Because we explained that for us it was not a political response to vote for Jacques Chirac. But we decided not to put Chirac and Le Pen on the same level. It was not easy to explain that. Especially in the organizations of the [left-wing, protest] social movements. But on the whole it was easier in the work places, the non-politicized people, the workers could easily understand what we were saying.



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