

The historical record of Pabloite opportunism

An exchange with a supporter of the French LCR

15 April 2004

The letter posted below was received by the WSW from a supporter of the Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire (LCR), one of several organizations in France claiming adherence to Trotskyism, in response to “European Social Forum: French LCR seeks to channel popular opposition to official left parties”. A reply by Antoine Lerougetel follows.

A letter from a supporter of the Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire

I fail to understand the November 17, 2003, article “European Social Forum: French LCR seeks to channel popular opposition to official left parties” by Chris Marsden and Peter Schwarz.

You say that the LCR (Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire) is a bourgeois party and that it merely follows the Plural Left [coalition led by the Socialist Party] in its Stalinist and neo-liberal line.

Let me remind you that the LCR is the French section of the Fourth International, the united Trotskyist organisation created to fight Stalinism and all forms of capitalism. We have never made a call to join with capitalism. If we advocate dialogue with the other parties, it is to call on them to unite again against capitalism. If you think that democracy and democratic openness are just bourgeois, then don’t call yourselves socialists.

We have also sharply criticised the Italian PCR for its backsliding, and have supported our comrades in the DS [Socialist Democracy] faction, who were expelled from the Brazilian PT [Workers Party].

The Stalinist and social-liberal traitors have no place in the class struggle. We want revolution, communism and Peace.

We have actively struggled against the bourgeoisie of the entire world, with force and devotion. Trotsky would reject you for what you have said. You just have hollow, wrangling words like the most fallacious gossip. The proletariat must prevail and we will.

Please provide us with plausible explanations for this defamation.

A reply by Antoine Lerougetel

Thank you for your letter asking for “plausible explanations” concerning the political characterizations made by the *World Socialist Web Site* of the Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire in France. We will reply in concrete historical terms that confirm our analysis of the LCR’s opportunist politics and refute your claim to have been “defamed” by the WSWS statement of November 17, 2003, entitled “The European Social Forum—the LCR tries to place popular opposition under the control of the official left.”

The International Committee of the Fourth International (ICFI) and the WSWS certainly do regard the LCR as an opportunist petty-bourgeois organisation (not, as you say, “a bourgeois party”).

In order to study the evolution of the LCR and the United Secretariat of the Fourth International (USFI)—the international tendency to which it belongs—we have to revisit the origins of the split that occurred in the international movement established by Leon Trotsky, the Fourth International (FI), in 1953. The Open Letter of James P. Cannon, leader of

the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) in the US, called on orthodox Trotskyists to form their own tendency in opposition to the opportunist grouping led by Michel Pablo, Ernest Mandel and others.

The tendency of Pablo and Mandel had arrived at the conclusion that the role of the Fourth International was not that of the world party of social revolution, as Trotsky envisioned it, but as an adviser to and pressure group on Stalinist, social democratic and bourgeois nationalist movements.

The end of World War II witnessed a deal decided at Potsdam and Yalta between Stalinism and imperialism to divide the world into spheres of influence. As a result, Stalinism directly intervened to suppress any attempt by workers to establish socialism in Europe. The “deformed workers states” set up by Stalin in Eastern Europe—where the emphasis should be on “deformed” rather than “workers”—were bureaucratic entities in which the belated nationalisation of private property was in no sense socialist since it was not based on the revolutionary overthrow of the capitalist state by the working class. Indeed, any such initiative on the part of workers was brutally repressed. Key examples of this were the East German uprising of 1953 and the 1956 Hungarian revolution.

The Stalinists opposed any attempt to utilize the collapse of fascist regimes as a means of opening the way for socialist revolution in Italy, Greece and France.

This gave American imperialism the opportunity to use its immense resources to rescue the totally discredited and collaborationist capitalist classes of Europe and to restabilise world capitalism.

These difficult conditions gave rise to a liquidationist theory called “the two blocs” put forward by Pablo, then secretary of the FI. This reactionary line essentially ruled out the working class acting as a politically independent force under the leadership of Trotskyists. Pablo and his co-thinkers argued that the conflict between imperialism and Stalinism (the Cold War was now in full swing) would push the latter to the left and force it to take power on an anti-capitalist basis. Therefore, the independent role of the FI was no longer necessary. They proposed, in other words, liquidation of the party into the “mass movements” of Stalinism and social democracy. Pablo engineered the expulsion of the majority of the French section of the FI because it would not go along with this line.

This revisionist attack reflected the pressure brought to bear on the Trotskyist movement as a result of the postwar settlement and the economic boom based on the relative strength of US imperialism. The attack was repulsed and orthodox Trotskyism defended through the founding by Cannon and his co-thinkers of the International Committee of the Fourth International in 1953, which today publishes the *World Socialist Web Site*.

Since that time the Pabloite tendency has participated in one betrayal after another of the interests of the international working class. Pabloite

leader Livio Maitan (Italy) recently referred to these betrayals euphemistically as “the backsliding” (“les derives”) during his opening speech to the recent 15th Congress of the United Secretariat.

To cite just four cases of Pabloite betrayal out of many, let us look at the record:

* In 1964 the LSSP, Sri Lankan section of the Pabloite USFI, entered the bourgeois government of Mrs. Bandaranaike. The result was disastrous for the working class. The LSSP helped entrench Sinhala chauvinism in the 1972 constitution, dividing the Tamil and Sinhalese working class and leading eventually to racist attacks on Tamils and a 20-year-long communal civil war.

* The Pabloite policy of Popular Frontism found its expression once again in the Italian Olive Tree Alliance, which formed a coalition government led by Romano Prodi. The Communist Refoundation Party (Rifundazione), in which the Pabloite Maitan plays a leading role, voted in parliament for Prodi’s anti-working class policies. The result? Berlusconi’s return to power. There was no struggle on the part of Communist Refoundation to defeat the Prodi Stalinist government. It was a left cover for another betrayal of workers’ interests by Stalinism or, as you say, “backsliding.” Rifundazione is now considering a coalition with the Olive Tree Alliance.

* A third case is that of Brazil. The bourgeois government of Lula is applying IMF policies at the expense of landless peasants through the Minister for Land Reform, Miguel Rossetto, a leading figure of your Brazilian movement, Socialist Democracy, a faction of the PT (Workers Party) in the government. This is bourgeois democracy in action aided by Pabloism. Here is what Livio Maitan said of Rossetto in his speech which opened the debates at the 15th Congress of the Pabloite United Secretariat of the Fourth International:

“In principle, we have never suffered from the fatal malady of the workers’ movement that is parliamentary cretinism, even if we have suffered some drifting at different times, from Sri Lanka to countries on other continents. Thus we are not afraid to stress, as a reflection of our growing influence, the fact that in the last decade we have had parliamentary representatives elected in a series of countries, from Brazil to the Philippines, Denmark to Portugal and to the European Parliament. In Brazil, a comrade like Miguel Rossetto, whose qualities and militant spirit are known, is today a member of the government emerging from the unprecedented popular success represented by the election of Lula. Miguel has assumed a crucial responsibility with the task of accomplishing a radical agrarian reform, capable of generating a more general dynamic of rupture with the system. We will follow and support his fight, supported by all the most advanced sectors of the PT and the MST [Landless Workers’ Movement] and, stifling an underlying anguish for the extreme difficulty of the enterprise, we express to him in this congress our warmest solidarity.”

The conscious deception in this paragraph is breathtaking.

* We must mention as well the infamous decision by the LCR to join the Stalinists, social democrats of the Socialist Party and Greens in April-May 2002 in calling for support for incumbent President Jacques Chirac against the extreme right-winger Jean-Marie Le Pen in the second round of the French presidential elections.

The LCR presidential candidate in the first round, Olivier Besancenot, made clear that he was voting for Chirac and called on others to do the same. Besancenot declared to the press, “We suggest all voters wash their hands on Sunday evening [i.e., after casting their votes for Chirac], and organise a third, social, round by going onto the streets in substantial numbers.” One of the LCR’s final press releases stated that it was necessary “to block the National Front at the ballot box as we have done in the street. On May 5 vote against Le Pen.” In a two-man race, what could have been clearer?

The program of your movement is firmly opportunist as witnessed by

the uncritical support given to the European Social Forum and the anti-globalisation Attac—which support the reform of capitalism through such devices such as the Tobin tax on capital transfers—endorsed by the Pabloite 15th Congress of the USFI. This again confirms the class nature of the LCR. The political independence of the working class is subordinated to these middle class protest movements because, as Maitan puts it, “the essential thing is to be in the movement.”

This is not a “dialogue” with people who are opposed to capitalism in order to remind them, as you suggest, “to unite against capitalism,” but rather a means of keeping illusions alive in protest politics and in national-reformist programs that have been abandoned by the social democrats and Stalinists and the trade union bureaucracies linked to them.

Contrary to these unprincipled manoeuvres, the role of the world Marxist party, the ICFI, is to bring before working people the profound nature of the capitalist crisis and defend the only viable solution, which is a socialist reconstruction of society. This is the task being undertaken by the ICFI, while the Pabloites work to spread the illusion that the interests of the working class can be defended within the confines of the capitalist system and its national and international institutions.

If you say that “the working class must prevail,” then the lessons of history must be learnt. The unity of workers and the ultimate victory of socialism depend on a revolutionary Marxist perspective. The pathetic calls by Alain Krivine of the LCR for the social democrats and Stalinists to “draw a balance sheet” of their time in a bourgeois government is to sow illusions in some kind of progressive element in these organisations. Workers have begun to draw their own balance sheet and voted against these worthless organizations or abstained.

However, the leaders of the LCR and Lutte Ouvrière have no intention of breaking from the politically degenerate forces inside the trade unions, but intend to stay married to them. A recent change in the statutes of the LCR removing all reference to the dictatorship of the proletariat underlines the right-wing trajectory of Pabloism.

In the coming period, radicalised youth and workers will have to see that the defence of their democratic rights and existence means a break from bourgeois politics and all its traps. Left opportunism of the LCR variety is one such trap.

Our intervention in the European, Sri Lankan and US presidential elections with Socialist Equality Party candidates will take forward the fight for a socialist perspective. This will bring us into conflict with those like the LCR who make a fetish of “being in the mass movement” as a means of adapting to the existing bureaucratic leaderships.

If you are serious about defending the heritage of Trotskyism, you will have to look at the historical record and break from the United Secretariat’s Pabloism and join forces with those who defend the basic principles of socialism.

Antoine Lerougetel



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