

# France: “far-left” LCR refuses to take a stand on police repression

Antoine Lerougetel  
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A leading member of the Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire (LCR—Revolutionary Communist League), Christian Piquet, opposed the demand for the withdrawal of riot police from working class estates at a meeting in Paris on November 4, even as the French government made plans for a massive increase in police repression.

The meeting, held at the LCR’s bookshop, discussed the wording of a leaflet to be distributed to the national demonstration and protest strike November 8 called by the trade unions and the Left parties in opposition to the government’s sweeping programme of privatisation, ongoing and planned.

For 10 days, youth in the working class suburbs, at first in the capital and now all over France, have been fighting against the massive intervention of heavily equipped riot police, the CRS (Republican Security Companies), on their estates in a movement sparked by the death of two teenagers fleeing police October 27. The leading spokesman of the LCR, Alain Krivine, in a communiqué on the party’s web site, had invited “progressive forces” to meet with his party to respond to the situation. WSWs reporters covered the meeting.

In the course of the meeting—led by Piquet, a leading member and journalist for the LCR weekly newspaper, *Rouge*—members of the LCR’s youth section, the JCR (Revolutionary Communist Youth), proposed that the appeal should call for the withdrawal of the riot police from the housing estates. Some of the delegates agreed that this was the principal demand coming from the youth and residents on the estates.

Piquet said, “I agree with the call to withdraw the riot police. I’m not sure that the PCF [French Communist Party] or the LDH [League for Human Rights] would agree.” Others pointed out that it would not just be the PCF. Additional organisations, they said, particularly the Stalinist-dominated CGT (General Confederation of Labour) and other trade unions, would also refuse to sign the appeal if this demand was included.

Piquet agreed to include the demand temporarily but he firmly asserted, “If this causes the withdrawal of organisations, then we will have to remove the demand from the text.” Everyone present was fully aware that this was tantamount to the LCR opposing the demand itself.

This reporter asked Piquet to confirm his statement, which he

did, and then asked all those present if they supported the demand for the withdrawal of the CRS from the estates. Most nodded and gave signs of assent. None indicated that they opposed the demand.

Some argued, in order to justify their acceptance of Piquet’s position, that the broadest possible unity was essential. Following the meeting, this reporter asked participants if they were prepared to unite with organisations that accepted the presence of the riot police on the estates. None wanted to press the issue, in the interests of “unity.” The JCR youth, who had also unsuccessfully raised the question of a demand for amnesty for youth jailed in responding to police provocation, were unable to answer when asked how they felt about their propositions being overridden.

Piquet told the meeting that the LCR had sent invitations to all the parties and organisations of the left. About 20 people were in attendance. The Communist Party had sent apologies and Annick Coupé of the left trade union group *Sud Solidaires* had said she would come. In the event, she did not show up. The Greens were the only political party to send a representative. The other participants, apart from LCR members and the representative of a small left group, were from anti-racist, feminist or other protest organisations.

## Falling in line with establishment

The refusal of the LCR to call unambiguously for the withdrawal of the CRS demonstrates that it has fallen into line behind the bourgeois establishment, which—in one form or another—is demanding the forceful oppression of the rebelling youth.

The CRS was not sent to the estates, to “protect the people,” but to oppress the youth. It is notorious for its brutality and its racism. Like Sarkozy’s inflammatory remarks referring to youth on the estates as “scum” and “gangrene,” its very presence is a permanent provocation.

The “unity” the LCR refers to is not the unity of the entire working class, including the oppressed youth of the suburbs,

but rather the alliance of the LCR with the PCF-Stalinists, the Greens and sections of the Socialist Party. These parties are responsible for implementing the very policies, under the presidency of François Mitterrand and the government of Lionel Jospin, that have led to the social crisis in the estates. Most of the affected estates are in municipalities run by Communist and Socialist Party mayors for decades.

The Socialist Party calls unashamedly for police repression. A statement, published by the party's national secretary for security questions, Delphine Batho, states: "The Socialist Party pays tribute to the work being carried out by the law enforcement agencies [police and CRS], the firemen, the social workers under extremely difficult circumstances."

And the president of the socialist group in the national assembly, Jean-Marc Ayrault, called for severe punishment of the youth: "To burn a car is not a banal act and it must be severely punished."

The Communist Party published a statement by its National Committee under the headline "Enough provocation and irresponsibility!" It states that "the reestablishment of law and order is a matter of extreme urgency." While blaming Sarkozy for the revolt and calling for his sacking, it does not make any appeal to the rest of the working class to defend the oppressed youth in the suburbs. A list of demands, aimed at alleviating some of the worst social problems in the suburbs, culminates in the demand for more money for "the penitentiary system."

It is significant that the LCR, which never ceases to make general calls for the "convergence" of struggles, is doing everything to isolate the youth in the suburbs from the millions of workers engaged in struggles against the pro-capitalist, neo-liberal policies of the French employers and the political establishment. These workers also have to deal with increased police and state repression. It is essential, in order to defeat those policies, that the struggles of the youth against poverty, unemployment, discrimination and repression be united with those of the rest of the working class in a political struggle against capitalism. This is precisely what the LCR avoids.

The elemental revolt of the youth is an expression of the developing crisis that earlier this year led to the rejection of the political establishment's campaign (including the Socialist Party) for the European constitution. It is driven by the same fundamental social contradictions that produced the overwhelming support of the French population for the October 4 strike and demonstrations, and the tenacious struggles of Marseille ferry and urban transport workers against privatisation, unemployment and the destruction of living standards and rights. The Communist Party and the CGT have sought to limit, isolate and defeat each of these struggles.

While covering for every betrayal of the trade union bureaucracy, including the recent sellout of the ferry workers by the CGT, the LCR hardly mentions the revolt in the suburbs in its publications. Its web site carries only a four-paragraph editorial from the most recent edition of *Rouge* on the events

that have shaken the Fifth Republic to its foundations over the last 11 days.

This much is clear. The LCR is a party of order. In the second round of the 2002 presidential election, it tacitly supported the candidacy of Jacques Chirac, France's leading bourgeois politician, supposedly as the lesser of two evils, against far-rightist Jean Marie Le Pen. Krivine, Piquet and the other leaders of the LCR are "left" members of the French establishment.

Immediately behind the LCR's refusal to take a stand on the withdrawal of the CRS lies its ambition to forge an alliance with the French Stalinists and the other parties of the so-called Plural Left. Olivier Besancenot, the LCR's presidential candidate in the first round of the 2002 election, has raised the possibility of forming an "anti-capitalist" electoral alliance with the Communist Party together with the 'No-to-the-European-constitution' camp of the Socialist Party. Clearly, the LCR is anticipating the reward of ministerial office in a new version of a Plural Left government.

Lionel Jospin's Plural Left government was decisively rejected by the electorate in 2002 because of its pro-business policies. The LCR would offer its services in an effort to provide left credibility for a new Socialist Party-Communist Party regime as a supposed alternative to the policies of Chirac, Villepin and Sarkozy.

All these political forces, left and right, have made the police repression of the youth revolt their priority in the present crisis.

Any member of the LCR with an elementary class consciousness and sense of political principle must be disgusted with the cowardly stand taken by Krivine and other leaders of the LCR.

French workers should reject all false and unprincipled calls for the unity of the bureaucracies of the different "left" organisations. These are based on an attempt to isolate workers and youth in struggle against big business and its allies in the political establishment. Their politics serve to only discredit the working class and socialism in the eyes of the oppressed section of youth.

The call for the defense of the youth on the estates and the withdrawal of the riot police must be part of a struggle to unify the working class behind a socialist programme—the replacement of the profit system by the planned use of the wealth of society to satisfy need and not to fill the pockets of the elite.



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