

French Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire turns further to the right

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The 16th Congress of the Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire (LCR—Revolutionary Communist League) held last month in the Parisian suburb of Saint-Denis was marked by a further integration of this pseudo-Trotskyist organisation into French society’s ruling apparatus.

The central topic discussed at the congress was the development of a collective political movement aimed at strengthening the discredited official parties of the left. One of the resolutions passed by the congress stated: “It is obvious that the time has come for a fundamental decision. Many people look to the political, trade union and anti-globalisation forces, which in the campaign against the European constitution came together in an anti-liberal and anti-capitalist struggle, and wish that all of us could be united, including for the upcoming elections. This hope is legitimate and we share it. In order to fulfil this we have to build a united collective movement...”

In fact, the role of such a collective movement would be to prevent the development of an independent political movement of the working class and to provide a new “left” pillar of support for the beleaguered French bourgeoisie, should the current right-wing government get into difficulties.

The five-year rule of the “Plural Left” government—an alliance of the French Socialist Party, Communist Party, Citizens Movement and the middle class left-wing radicals, under the “Socialist” prime minister Lionel Jospin—ended in an election debacle in 2002. Jospin placed third in the presidential election, trailing behind the fascist Jean-Marie Le Pen. Since then, the parties of the Plural Left have been in a state of crisis. The LCR is now attempting to create a political mechanism through which these parties can return to power.

One congress resolution, however, stated that the LCR does not intend “to build an alternative with the social liberals or to develop governmental policies.” According to the resolution there are “two lefts” that stand in irreconcilable opposition to one another—one “anti-capitalist” and the other “social-liberal” (where “liberal” stands for free-market economic policies). This is nothing more than window dressing. For a long time the LCR has stood with both feet planted firmly in the camp of the official capitalist left.

This is shown by the fact that the Communist Party (Parti communiste français—PCF) is being heavily courted as a preferred partner in the collective movement. The PCF has been a reliable prop for capitalist rule ever since the People’s Front of the 1930s and the entry of its leader Maurice Thorez into the first post-war government under General Charles de Gaulle. Since 1981, Communist ministers have been political fixtures in numerous Socialist Party governments. Marie-George Buffet, the current chairman of the PCF, was a minister under the Jospin government and shared complete responsibility for its “social-liberal” policies, a fact the LCR conveniently conceals.

Since 2002, the leaders of the LCR and PCF have worked together closely, holding regular meetings to discuss common initiatives and activities and sharing platforms at public meetings.

The PCF in turn maintains close ties to the leadership of the Socialist Party and is anxious to include the LCR in this relationship. Marie-George Buffet wanted to invite the LCR to a meeting of the parties that comprised the now-defunct Plural Left, against the wishes of the Socialist Party, in order to discuss a common platform for the presidential and parliamentary elections in 2007. “Has the Communist Party suddenly become the best defenders of the Trotskyists in the LCR?” scoffed the French newspaper *Le Monde* in response to Buffet’s efforts.

It was the LCR itself that ended the dispute, saying that it would not participate in the meeting. It proclaimed that the party rejected discussing a common government programme, but at the same time made clear that it was fully prepared to work together with the Socialist Party.

LCR spokesman Olivier Besancenot told the magazine *L’Express*: “As arrogant as they are, the Socialists only want to discuss a common programme for government. But we are just as little interested today as yesterday in accepting and swallowing the anger of the Plural Left II or in writing a blank cheque for them. If we were invited to help develop concrete common initiatives to tackle the right, we would go.”

The LCR’s congress resolution also expressed the aim of working together with “every force in the workers movement, trade unions, parties and organisations” (in other words, also with the Socialist Party) in order “to stymie the right wing, the liberals and management.” With this invitation the LCR is re-evaluating the Socialist Party, a party whose representatives in recent years have not even dared to appear at workers’ demonstrations.

That the LCR only verbally distances itself from the “social-liberals” is shown by the fact that the party counts as part of the anti-capitalist camp all those who called for a “no” vote in the referendum on a European constitution last May. The LCR refers regularly to the “lefts calling for a ‘no’ vote” and contrasts them to the “lefts calling for a ‘yes’ vote.”

In reality there were many political tendencies that fought against the constitution, many of which were anything but anti-capitalist. One of the most prominent representatives of the “no” camp alongside the PCF was Laurent Fabius, a notorious right-wing Socialist Party member. Fabius broke with the SP majority, which fought for a “yes” vote, because he thought he would stand a better chance of being nominated as the party’s presidential candidate.

Significantly, Fabius is one of the Socialists who are now ready to

work with the LCR. During the SP's argument with Buffet about the February 8 meeting, Fabius stood alongside Buffet, who wanted to invite the LCR. Fabius wanted "a collection of the left" that "excluded nobody," i.e., including the LCR, while the SP leadership wanted to invite only those that "wanted to govern together."

Fabius is looking to take advantage of the election potential of the LCR, whose candidate Olivier Besancenot received 1.2 million votes in the last presidential election. This was approximately the same vote received by Arlette Laguiller, candidate for Lutte Ouvrière, another party that claims to be Trotskyist.

For its part, the LCR has stated that it will support the candidate of the official left in the second round of the election. A resolution passed by the congress states: "The LCR will remain true to its traditions during the upcoming elections and support the candidate of the left when it is opposed by a candidate of the extreme right, even when our political organisation is conscious of the limits (or illusions) of social-liberalism."

During the presidential election of 2002, however, the LCR did not call for a vote for a "social-liberal," but went so far as to support a right-wing Gaullist. When Jacques Chirac and the candidate from the National Front, Jean-Marie Le Pen, faced off in the second round, the LCR actively campaigned for Chirac's re-election. It is therefore easy to see what the LCR will do during the next election if Nicolas Sarkozy, the current French interior minister, stands as expected as the presidential candidate of the conservatives. Sarkozy has adopted many of the policies of Le Pen. The LCR—at the latest during the second round—would energetically campaign for the "social-liberal" candidate.

The collective movement fought for by the LCR functions as a vehicle to help bring the "plural left" back in power. Alongside the PCF, the LCR hopes to win the support of other organisations that have a long tradition of supporting French capitalism: the trade unions and the so-called "anti-globalisation forces."

The latter do not reject capitalism, only some of its international manifestations, to which they seek to counterpose a national reformist program. Attac, in particular, maintains a close relationship with the Socialist Party. Another prominent member of the anti-globalisation forces is the farmer-unionist José Bové, whose militant anti-American actions catapulted him to fame. Bové is a possible presidential candidate of a collective left movement.

Such a colourful patchwork of organisations based on reformist and nationalist conceptions can provide no answer to the social and political problems confronting the working class in France and internationally.

If there is a central lesson to be learned from the struggles of the previous years, it is the complete bankruptcy of the old reformist workers organisations. The Social Democrats, Stalinists and trade unions have reacted to every social struggle by moving further to the right. The governments of Jospin in France, Blair in England, Schröder in Germany and D'Alema in Italy have implemented wide-ranging social attacks with the support of the trade unions, going beyond what previous conservative governments have dared for fear of provoking an open confrontation with the working class.

The working class cannot take one step forward without breaking with these organisations and turning to an international socialist perspective. But this is exactly what the LCR is trying to prevent.

This is why it works closely with the same forces that it publicly stigmatises as "social-liberals." Last October 4, it put its signature on a demonstration leaflet alongside those of the Socialists, Communists,

Greens and left radicals groups. Two months later LCR leader Alain Krivine and Dominique Strauss-Kahn from the right wing of the Socialist Party held a joint press conference and presented a common petition against a law introduced by the government glorifying France's colonial history.

This cooperation is highly significant and has been recognised as such by the bourgeois press. It makes clear that the LCR is prepared to take the last final step when the next political crisis in France erupts: its entry into government. In Brazil its co-thinkers already have this step behind them. There, a member of the United Secretariat, to which the LCR belongs, sits as a minister in the Brazilian cabinet.

The right-wing development of the LCR has not proceeded, however, without internal tensions. The 180 delegates at the conference represented five different tendencies—each with its own platform. Differences of opinion between these currents do not revolve around issues of political orientation—the building of a collective "left" movement enjoys the support of an overwhelming majority—but rather the tempo with which this perspective is to be implemented.

Since the substantial vote for Besancenot in the 2002 presidential election, the LCR has, according to its own figures, doubled its membership to 3,000. For these new members, the liquidation of the LCR into an amorphous left movement is not occurring fast enough. Many of them came into contact with the LCR during the campaign over the EU constitution, when the LCR was working closely with the PCF, the Greens and the various opponents of globalisation. Such members reject everything that stands in the way of these organisations' amalgamation.

The spokesman of this tendency is LCR political committee member Christian Picquet, whose platform was supported by approximately a third of the delegates. The tendency led by Léonce Aguirre, whose policies go in the same direction, received 9 percent of the vote.

For the first time in the history of the LCR, the tendency led by long-time party leader Alain Krivine and Olivier Besancenot, was in the minority. It received only 49 percent of the delegates' votes, 9 percentage points less than at the previous congress. Krivine and Besancenot want to perpetuate a semblance of organisational independence so that the radical image of the LCR and its role as a left fig leaf is not used up too quickly.

The discussion between the tendencies at the congress revolved around the question of whether the LCR will again stand its own candidate in the 2007 presidential elections or abstain, to the benefit of one of the other left candidates. Krivine wanted to keep the option of standing a candidate open, while Picquet viewed such a candidacy as a barrier to the development of an all-inclusive left-wing movement.

They all quickly agreed to a compromise. The issue was deferred. A special congress is to be held in six months time to make a final decision.



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