

WSWS International Editorial Board meeting

# The dead-end of European capitalism and the tasks of the working class

## Part Three

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Part 1 | Part 2 | Part 3

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*WSWS IEB chairman David North's report was posted on 27 February. SEP (Australia) national secretary Nick Beams' report was posted in three parts: Part one on February 28, Part two on March 1 and Part three on March 2. James Cogan's report on Iraq was posted on March 3. Barry Grey's report was published in two parts: Part one on March 4 and Part two on March 6. Patrick Martin's report was published in two parts: Part one on March 7 and Part two on March 8. John Chan report on China was published in three parts: Part one was posted on March 9, Part two on March 10 and Part three on March 11.*

With the decline in influence of the Social Democrats and Stalinism, the European bourgeoisie is dependent on new left props. In France, the Pabloite Ligue Communiste Revolutionnaire (LCR) is preparing to enter a "left" government. A political settling of accounts with Pabloism is therefore of great importance.

A half-century ago, Michael Pablo and Ernest Mandel developed the theory that the socialist revolution would not proceed through an independent movement of the working class under the banner of the Fourth International but rather through the Stalinist bureaucracy, which would shift to the left under pressure from the masses. They also extended this concept to include other political tendencies such as petty bourgeois nationalists like Fidel Castro and the Sandinistas, as well as applying it to social democracy and the trade unions.

Capitalist restoration in the Soviet Union and the utter bankruptcy of bourgeois nationalism, social reformism and the trade unions have put the final nails into the coffin of this theory. The reaction of the Pabloites and petty bourgeois radicals has been to integrate themselves even more completely into the bourgeois state. Rather than representing any expression of popular revolt, these organizations are nothing more than the left flank of the bourgeois superstructure.

This is especially clear in France, where class conflicts take an extreme form and where, for historical reasons, Pabloite opportunism plays a particularly influential role.

For some time, the French bourgeoisie has found an almost inexhaustible reservoir among the milieu of ex-Trotskyists and radicals for a new generation of politicians and intellectuals. Edwy Plenel, the

longstanding editor-in-chief of *Le Monde*, was for ten years a member of the Pabloite LCR. He writes in his memoirs of "several tens of thousands" who were active in the sixties and seventies in radical groups and who have since "rejected their militant teachings". Today, such people can be found in editorial offices, university philosophical faculties and political parties throughout France.

After the strike movement in the winter of 1995-96 precipitated a severe crisis for the conservative government of Alain Juppé, the ruling class appointed a prime minister who had spent 20 years of his political life—from the mid-sixties to the mid-eighties—in the Organisation Communiste Internationaliste (OCI) of Pierre Lambert.

As a secret OCI member, Lionel Jospin had joined the Socialist Party in 1971 and backed the ascendancy of François Mitterrand. When Mitterrand became French president in 1981, Jospin was national secretary of the Socialist Party and still a member of the OCI.

As prime minister, Jospin struck a pose as a "left", who, unlike Tony Blair in Britain or Gerhard Schröder in Germany, would not capitulate to neo-liberalism. In fact, in terms of their content, his policies hardly differed from those of Blair and Schröder. Five years later, Jospin was so discredited that he lost in the first round of the presidential elections to office holder Jacques Chirac and Jean Marie Le Pen of the National Front.

At the time, the LCR played an important role in curbing and pacifying the spontaneous mass movement against Le Pen, directing it into support for Chirac. Our movement actively intervened in these events and reported in detail on what took place.

Three radical groups—the LCR, Lutte Ouvrière and the OCI—whose candidates received a combined 10 percent of the vote, either called for support for Chirac or adopted a passive position. For our part, we opposed a vote in favour of Chirac and called for an active election boycott. Such a tactic was necessary in order to provide the working class with an independent political alternative and to politically educate it in preparation for the coming struggles.

Developments since then have completely confirmed our prognosis. The election campaign enabled Chirac, who was an unpopular president entangled in corruption scandals, to make a political comeback. He exploited the opportunity to also win a majority two months later in the National Assembly (parliament). He thereby acquired an authority that bore no relation to his actual social support.

As we forecast at the time, Chirac used this power to pave the way for the most reactionary forces. Since then, Nicolas Sarkozy, a man who shares much the same programme as the National Front, has taken over the leadership of Chirac's party. The Pabloites of the LCR bear direct political responsibility for this development.

## Popular Frontism

These forces are now working feverishly to revive the sort of “left coalition” that failed so dismally under Jospin. Both within the LCR and among its possible coalition partners, a discussion is taking place over whether, and under what conditions, the Pabloites should take part in government.

At a recent meeting organized by the Stalinist daily *L'Humanité*, the LCR speaker Olivier Besancenot laid out the basis for LCR support for a unified left candidacy at the next elections.

According to Besancenot, a precondition is “majority politics against [economic] liberalism,” which are “clearly anti-capitalist”. In fact, this precondition is so broad that a whale could swim through it. Virtually the entire political spectrum in France is prepared to declare its opposition to some form of “liberalism”—including right-wing bourgeois parties. Even the most right-wing socialists proclaim they are “anti-capitalist”.

The LCR is already co-operating closely with the Stalinists. The leading committees of the French Communist Party (PCF) and the LCR meet at regular intervals to agree on common initiatives and activities. Last October, the LCR put its signature to a joint leaflet in the name of the Socialist Party, the Greens, Left Radicals and the PCF calling for a trade union demonstration.

When the chairman of the Socialist Party, François Hollande, was asked directly by the newspaper *Le Figaro* whether he was ready to govern with the LCR, he replied evasively: “We are ready to assemble the entire left around a government contract.”

The draft resolution for the LCR’s 16th Congress, which is meeting as we speak, calls for a kind of Popular Front. The resolution proposes a “unified policy” of “social movements, as well as the anti-liberals and anti-capitalist left”, around “developing a counter-attack to the neo-liberal offensive and the nationalist right”. On the basis “of a program of urgent social and democratic measures ... a new balance of power is to be created against liberal politics”.

The meaning of these formulations is unmistakable: on the basis of a program of minimal social and democratic demands, the LCR wants to unite the parties that were involved in the Jospin government, as well as other movements such as Attac and *sans papiers* (which campaigns for immigrant rights), in order to construct a new government should the conservatives lose control. Like its historical predecessor—the Popular Front government under Leon Blum in the 1930s—such a government would have the task of saving French capitalism in a period of intense social crisis.

The Pabloites have already carried out a similar move in Brazil where one of their members is a minister in the government of President Ignazio “Lula” da Silva.

The fact that representatives of the French bourgeoisie are discussing the inclusion of the Pabloites in government is an expression of the depth of the political crisis. The political battle lines have become clear. There is nothing standing between the revolutionary perspective of the International Committee and the defenders of bourgeois rule.

The Pabloites have also played a significant role in defending the bourgeois order in Italy. Rifondazione Comunista (RF), which emerged in 1991 out of the collapse of Italy’s Communist Party, has for some time been a role model for petty bourgeois radicals throughout Europe.

Most of the Italian radicals have closed ranks with RF. Up to his death in 2004, the prominent Italian Pabloite, Livio Maitan, was one of the most important advisors to RF head Fausto Bertinotti. Two years ago, a member of Maitan’s tendency described Rifondazione as a tool, “by

which we could, through a complex process of collisions, breaks, experiments, openings and regroupings, move towards the reorganization of a new revolutionary political subject”. [4]

Rifondazione is no such thing. Any serious investigation of its role shows that it represents a crucial obstacle to the emergence of an independent, socialist orientation in the working class.

During the political crises of the 1990s, Rifondazione ensured a parliamentary majority for a number of bourgeois governments, although it did not join any government itself and endeavoured to keep one foot in the extra-parliamentary protest movements.

In the summer of 2003, at the height of the social protests when the Berlusconi government was under mounting pressure, party chief Bertinotti declared his readiness to agree on a program for centre-left parties and to participate as a minister in a future government under Romano Prodi.

In Germany, the Left Party led by Gregor Gysi and Oskar Lafontaine is striving to establish a new left prop for bourgeois rule. Their claim to represent an alternative to the established parties is even more threadbare and improbable than in the case of Rifondazione.

The Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS), which is the successor organization to the state party in the former East Germany, has long since established its pro-capitalist credentials. It shares political power in the city government of Berlin and in East Germany. The capital is saddled in debt, and under PDS rule has become the frontrunner for cuts in education, hospitals and other public facilities elsewhere in Germany. The SPD-PDS city legislature demanded that Berlin’s public transport employees accept an overall wage cut of 10 percent.

In 1998, Oskar Lafontaine, who now leads the parliamentary faction of the Left Party together with Gregor Gysi, was SPD chairman and architect of Gerhard Schröder’s election victory. For his services, Lafontaine was appointed as finance minister in the SPD-Green coalition. Formerly, he had made his political career as a state premier in the Saarland, where he was instrumental in closing down the region’s coal and steel industries.

The Left Party does not even question the basis of capitalism. Its program is limited to social reforms within the confines of the nation state, which it vehemently defends. Its proclaimed aim is to participate at the national level in a coalition with the SPD.

Widespread disappointment and anger with the SPD meant the Left Party was able to pick up votes in last year’s election, overtake the Greens and enter the Bundestag with its own parliamentary group. However, parliamentary success has not brought about any sizable growth in membership and the party’s opinion poll ratings have been sinking for some time. The party’s active membership comprises old-time trade union bureaucrats in the west and former Stalinist supporters in the east.

Once again, it is the pseudo-Trotskyists and Pabloites who are seeking to depict the Left Party in the rosier of colours and breathe new life into what is a very conservative organization. Following the capitalist reunification of Germany, a number of prominent German representatives of the Pabloite United Secretariat joined the PDS. Now German followers of the Militant Tendency and International Socialists are campaigning intensively for the Left Party.

In summing up, one can say that the social and political crisis of European capitalism has reached a very advanced stage.

The European Union is stuck in a dead-end; international conflicts and tensions within Europe are intensifying, social inequality has developed on a vast scale, the living standards of broad social layers are sinking, and the working class has gone through many bitter experiences with its old organizations.

It is our task to give conscious expression to these experiences, draw the necessary political lessons and untiringly defend all democratic and social rights. The socialist unification of Europe—as Trotsky said, a “revolutionary task of the European proletariat”—now assumes direct

practical significance.

At the centre of these tasks lies the development of the European work of the *World Socialist Web Site*. We must write more, and more often, we must be more thorough and more polemical. At the same time, we should use the opportunities opening up to us to actively intervene in political developments—such as participation in elections.

*Concluded*

**Notes:**

4. Flavia D’Angeli, “New turn for PRC,” *International Viewpoint* 359, May/June 2004.



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