

The pathetic end of the French “anti-capitalist left”

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Following the nomination of Ségolène Royal as the Socialist Party’s candidate in this year’s French presidential election, the project of an “anti-liberal” (“liberal” in the sense of a “free market” advocate) or “anti-capitalist left” candidate has wretchedly imploded.

A national meeting December 9-10 of the so-called “collectives” in Ile Saint-Denis, north of Paris, was unable to agree on a common candidate for the 2007 presidential and parliamentary elections, as the various political groupings that made up the collectives were hopelessly divided. The collectives were formed two years ago out elements of the French Communist Party (Parti Communiste Français—PCF), the Revolutionary Communist League (Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire—LCR), various trade unions, social protest movements, opponents of globalization, some individual representatives of the Socialist Party (Parti Socialiste—PS) and the Greens.

Above all, the pseudo-Trotskyist LCR has doggedly sought to bring about the union of all the left organizations that advocated a “No” vote in France at the time of the May 2005 referendum on the European Union constitution into a broad political movement or party.

According to the LCR, the successful “No” vote in the referendum meant a “new situation on the left” had now arisen, as the organization put it at the party’s 16th congress in January 2006. The “No” vote forms the “starting point for the preparation of a common movement against the politics of the government” and makes possible “the setting up of a new anti-capitalist force.” The LCR has committed itself to unite all the left opponents of the European Union constitution in a new formation that “is able to politically express the real balance of power in favour of a left which is 100 percent left-wing.”

The LCR entertains great hopes in the Stalinist PCF, which, according to its congress resolution, “stands at the crossroads”; the PCF, says the LCR, confronts the inevitable choice “between the affirmation of an anti-capitalist left as the logical continuation of the ‘No’ campaign and the reconciliation of the left organizations of the ‘No’ and the ‘Yes’ camps with the perspective of forming a government.” The “left organizations of the ‘Yes’ camp” refers to the right-wing majority of the Socialist Party, which vehemently advocated the acceptance of

the European Union constitution.

The PCF welcomed the LCR’s offer and took part in the collectives, seeing it as an opportunity to refurbish its left-wing image, which has been seriously compromised by decades of close collaboration with the Socialist Party and its participation in numerous PS-led governments.

However, during the past year it became clear that the PCF had absolutely no intention of breaking off relations with the Socialist Party. This came as no real surprise to anybody who understands French politics; the PCF has been a defender of French capitalism and a reliable prop for the French bourgeois state ever since the PCF joined the Popular Front governments of the 1930s and participated in the first post-war government under Charles de Gaulle. In 1968, it played a key role in suppressing the general strike. In 1971, it allied itself with François Mitterrand’s Socialist Party, and between 1981 and 2002 held ministerial office in numerous governments.

The PCF is not only politically closely connected with the Socialist Party—it is also organizationally dependent upon it. The peculiarities of the French voting system are such that without reaching electoral accords with the PS, the French Stalinist party has hardly any chance of securing seats in the National Assembly or of clinging on to its regional and local offices, upon which the entire party apparatus has been based.

Despite all this, the LCR promotes the illusion that the PCF could still become an important component of a “new anti-capitalist force.” The LCR declared in its January congress resolutions that “despite the retreats of the past years” the PCF “still retained a militant attitude and an influence among ‘communist-minded people,’ which made it possible to play a central role in the referendum campaign.”

Last autumn, the LCR finally recognized the time had come to dissociate itself from its own project. It could no longer be denied that the PCF was seeking a further government alliance with the Socialist Party. This was despite the fact the PS had nominated Ségolène Royal—a representative of the right wing of the party—as its presidential candidate. Royal is an unscrupulous careerist whose politics do not significantly differ from those of her Gaullist adversary, the notorious Nicolas Sarkozy. She is an admirer of British Prime Minister Tony Blair and intends to compete with Sarkozy from the right on domestic security and

immigration policy.

The majority of the LCR, under the leadership of Alain Krivine and Olivier Besancenot, withdrew from the collectives. A minority under Christian Piquet, which represents about a third of the LCR, remained and signalled its readiness to participate in a new version of the so-called “plural left,” the coalition of the PS, PCF, the Greens and bourgeois radicals upon which the government of former prime minister Lionel Jospin based itself.

After the withdrawal of the LCR, the PCF tried to remodel the collectives as an election association for its own chair, Marie-Georges Buffet. But this move encountered resistance from the other political elements involved. The national gathering December 9-10 in Ile Saint-Denis failed to produce a majority for Buffet, who will stand as the PCF candidate in the presidential election.

In mid-December, the LCR published a provisional balance sheet of its efforts to establish “united candidacies” in the 2007 elections. It has been quickly established, the LCR wrote, that the PCF is not ready to exclude a future parliamentary or government alliance with the Socialist Party and “keeps open the possibility of an agreement with the PS.” Since a “unity candidate of the forces of the left is only meaningful” if it includes the PCF, the LCR will once again run Olivier Besancenot as its own candidate.

This argument is fraudulent. From the very beginning, the entire campaign for a left unity candidate was a cynical manoeuvre aimed above all at one thing: blocking workers from drawing the lessons of the pro-capitalist role of the PS and PCF and developing a revolutionary socialist alternative independent of these worthless organizations and their hangers-on among the petty bourgeois ‘left’ opportunists.

This task was accomplished—at least provisionally—by the campaign for an “anti-capitalist left.” Ségolène Royal will enter the presidential elections without any serious challenge from the left. Olivier Besancenot, PCF leader Marie-Georges Buffet and several other “left” candidates will stand in the first round of the presidential elections on April 22, only then, if Royal is in the second round, to support the Socialist Party candidate as the “lesser evil” in the run-off.

The massive social and political opposition in the general population to the status quo, which has consistently expressed itself in the recent past in strikes and protest movements lasting weeks, will find no expression in the election.

Besancenot is already stressing at every opportunity that he takes seriously the question of who should form the next government—i.e. either Sarkozy or Royal. In the last presidential election five years ago, Besancenot and the LCR, along with the PCF, rallied around Gaullist Jacques Chirac in the second round against the neo-fascist candidate Jean-Marie Le Pen.

It would be wrong to imagine that behind the cynical manoeuvres of the LCR lie political naïveté or confusion. For decades the LCR and the international tendency to which it

belongs, the Pabloite United Secretariat, have specialized in thwarting revolutionary developments by steering them behind the various Stalinist and social-democratic bureaucracies and bourgeois nationalist movements.

To this end, Michel Pablo, who lent his name to this tendency; Ernest Mandel, the former long-standing leader of the United Secretariat; and his French apprentice, Alain Krivine, have continually glorified Stalinist, reformist or nationalist movements and their leaders, saying these had replaced or made unnecessary the need to build an independent revolutionary party of the working class.

The Algerian FLN, Fidel Castro’s movement and the Nicaraguan Sandinistas were all among the role-models of the United Secretariat, likewise Michael Gorbachev and Boris Yeltsin and—in more recent times—Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez and his Bolivian counterpart, Evo Morales.

The results have always been the same: the leaders and movements glorified by the Pabloites either turned sharply to the right or opened the door to right-wing forces. The revolutionary aspirations of the working class, which helped these leaders and movements come to power, were then suppressed and betrayed. Not infrequently, workers paid a high and bloody price.

More recently, members of the United Secretariat have taken up ministerial office in bourgeois governments. In Brazil, the Pabloites joined the Workers Party of President Lula da Silva and participated in his government. In Italy, they are active in the leadership of Rifondazione Comunista, which is an important component of Romano Prodi’s coalition government.

One should not be deceived by the LCR’s assertions that it will never enter a government coalition with the Socialist Party. The entire logic of its politics points to one conclusion: that it would accept ministerial positions should the social crisis intensify and the French bourgeoisie require the safety valve of a “left” government to ensure its continued rule.



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