

France: Guy Môquet, Sarkozy and the Stalinist school of falsification

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After his official installation as French president May 16, Nicolas Sarkozy's first engagement was a memorial ceremony to fallen Resistance fighters against the Nazi occupation of France during the Second World War.

Sarkozy used the event to issue his first presidential decree: the obligatory annual public reading in schools of Guy Môquet's letter to his family shortly before his execution by a Nazi firing squad on October 22, 1941. Sarkozy intends this to serve as an example of "heroism" and "sacrifice" for the "nation." The 17-year-old Môquet was a member of the Young Communists.

The visit to the memorial ceremony and his proclamation about the letter brings to light an important historical episode that reveals the counter-revolutionary essence of French Stalinism.

The initial indignation of French Communist Party (PCF) leader Marie-George Buffet at Sarkozy's cynical use of Môquet's death to promote nationalism during his election campaign was short-lived. "The reading of Guy Môquet's last letter before his execution is a strong message," she declared, after Sarkozy had pronounced his presidential decree, "because this young man was a patriot through his engagement in the Resistance, but also because his combat for the emancipation of humanity had a goal, that of constructing a Republic of rights and liberties in a democracy."

Buffet's servile falling into line with Sarkozy reinforces the latter's attempts to present himself as president of "all the French."

A statement by the PCF on Guy Môquet, dated May 21, 2007 and posted on its web site, states: "He was arrested on October 13, 1940, at the Gare de l'Est station [in Paris]. Well before the invasion of the USSR by the Nazis. Guy Môquet was denounced [to the police] because, with his Young Communist comrades, he was distributing leaflets in cinemas or demonstrating against the occupation and the collaboration [with the Nazis of the Pétain government]. His father, a rail worker and Communist, had at that time been deported to a harsh prison, the Maison-Carée, in Algeria, and the French police guarded this Popular Front deputy who was opposed to the 100 capitalist families who controlled France and engaged in struggle against fascism, which had for years threatened Europe."

This statement is a typical example of the Stalinist school of historical falsification.

Prosper Môquet, Guy's father, was one of the 72 Communist Party deputies elected to the National Assembly on May 3, 1936. In May 1935, Stalin had signed a cooperation treaty with the right-wing Laval government, implicitly recognising French military policy and directing the French CP to vote for the military budget. This alliance of Stalin and the French CP with French imperialism continued under the Popular Front government.

The Popular Front was made up of the Communist Party, the Socialist Party and the bourgeois Radical Party. It tied the working class to the bourgeoisie and opposed the development of an independent, socialist and internationalist perspective. Its first act was to prevent the May-June general strike developing into a revolutionary insurrection. It saw the

defence of France from Nazi attack purely in nationalist terms, not as the conflict of great powers for imperialist advantage using the working class and the youth as cannon fodder.

On September 30, 1938, Neville Chamberlain for Britain and Edouard Daladier for France signed the Munich Treaty of appeasement to Hitler. They thus gave the Nazis the go-ahead to invade Czechoslovakia. Stalin feared that Britain and France were preparing to unite with Germany against the Soviet Union.

Instead of attempting to mobilise the world working class against this imperialist alliance, Stalin made a pre-emptive alliance of his own: the Hitler-Stalin Pact of August 23, 1939.

Less than one month later, on September 20, 1939, Stalin's Comintern informed the French CP of its new line: the Communist Parties should not support the war against Germany declared by France and Britain in response to Hitler's invasion of Poland. What previously the Stalinists had characterised as a war of "national defence" they now qualified as an "imperialist war." The Communist Party should oppose it along these lines since Germany was in alliance with the Soviet Union.

In *l'Humanité*, September 26, 1940, the PCF was lambasting the Gaullist resistance as "war-mongers with other people's lives" and denouncing "the common will of the imperialists to drag France into the war, on the German or the other side in the name of a supposed resistance against the oppressor."

Leading PCF member and secretary of the Stalinist Communist International, André Marty, sent a letter on October 4, 1939, to Léon Blum, a member of Daladier's government, denouncing his support for the war. "The present war is a war provoked by two groups of imperialists, each wanting to rob the other; consequently, the workers, the peasants, have nothing to do with this affair."

As a consequence, President Edouard Daladier, on September 26, 1939, decreed the dissolution of the PCF. He had many of its members and deputies, including Prosper Môquet, interned. Prosper, arrested on October 10, 1939, was tried by a secret military tribunal in April 1940 and sentenced to five years imprisonment. He was deported in March 1941 to the Maison-Carré prison in Algeria.

The Nazis invaded France on June 10, 1940, and Marshal Pétain signed the armistice, 12 days later. The sympathy of large sections of the French bourgeoisie for fascism played an important part in the rout of the French army. The French Communist Party, which tailored its policy to Soviet diplomatic needs, had been banned and many of its leaders imprisoned by its former allies in the Popular Front.

Prosper Môquet, therefore, was jailed, not for anti-fascist activities as asserted by the PCF in its May 21, 2007, statement (the statement, in fact, implies anti-Nazi activities); on the contrary, the Stalinist party was momentarily opposing the war with fascist Germany. Indeed, although no doubt other political considerations came into play (an opportunity to repress left-wing tendencies in the working class), Guy Môquet's father was officially condemned for "complicity with the enemy" ("*intelligence*

avec l'ennemi"), and was certainly not a member at that time of the by-then-defunct Popular Front. He was, in fact, a political prisoner of the government of the Radical Party leader Daladier, a former minister in the Popular Front government of Léon Blum.

A search in the Paris local government archives by two journalists, Jean-Pierre Besse and Claude Pannetier, in 2006, found notes that recorded negotiations between the PCF led by Maurice Tréand and Otto Abetz, Nazi Foreign Affairs Minister Ribbentrop's representative. They reveal that Stalin's emissaries were not above ingratiating themselves with the Nazi occupier by means of some well-placed anti-Semitism.

Tréand, under the direction of PCF Central Committee Secretary Jacques Duclos, tried in vain to get the Nazis to allow the publication of the PCF's newspaper *l'Humanité*. The negotiations lasted from June to August 1940.

Tréand argued: "We have worked well for the USSR and indirectly for you.... [W]e will do nothing for you but nothing against you." Attacking the English capitalists and its French allies, Tréand refers to the "Jew Mandel." Georges Mandel was the last Minister of the Interior before the Nazi Occupation. Tréand speaks of the "Jew Mandel" three times, "who had workers shot for sabotaging national defence."

A text drawn up by Duclos and presented to the German authorities reads in part as follows: "*L'Humanité* published by us will have as its task the pursuit of a policy of European pacification and defend the conclusion of a Franco-Soviet friendship treaty, which will be a complement to the German-Soviet pact and thus will create the conditions for durable peace."

Stalin was well aware of the opposition and disarray that such policies were creating amongst the mass of workers and party members. Many resigned, including a third of the PCF's deputies. Many did not wait for the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union to begin clandestine activity against the Occupation. A telegram dated June 22, 1940, and signed by the secretary of the Communist International Georgi Dimitrov and PCF General Secretary Maurice Thorez, stated, "Use the slightest favourable possibility to get trade union, local [party] papers and eventually *l'Humanité* published, while not giving the impression of solidarity or approbation with invaders."

The French police arrested and imprisoned Guy Môquet, at the age of 16, on October 13, 1940. France was occupied, but it was to be nine months before the Nazi invasion of Russia put an end to the Hitler-Stalin Pact. The May 21 PCF statement, quoted at the beginning of this article, asserts that he was distributing leaflets "against the occupation and against the collaboration," but it is highly unlikely that he would have been thus acting against the party line. Another commentator gives a strong indication, however, that the issues he was campaigning for and the reasons for his arrest were somewhat different: "After the occupation of Paris by the Germans and the establishment of the Vichy government, Guy campaigned passionately putting up stickers in his neighbourhood denouncing the new government and demanding the freeing of the internees," one of whom, of course, was his own father.

The media have all gone along with the Stalinists' account and have made no attempt to clarify Prosper's situation at the time of his son's arrest. They have spared the PCF the rattling of this particular skeleton in its cupboard, so as not to disrupt this latest adaptation of Stalinism to Gaullism.

With the Nazi invasion of the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941, the PCF made another volte face, returning to its Popular Front stance of anti-fascism rather than anti-imperialism, entering into an alliance with the Gaullist Resistance with the aim of re-establishing bourgeois rule after the liberation rather than a working class socialist republic.

The PCF's theoretical organ *Cahiers du Bolchévisme* in late 1941 states, "the French people salute the soldiers of de Gaulle, fighters for the good cause, anti-Hitler fighters." This unity with the national bourgeoisie was cemented when the Stalinists entered de Gaulle's National Resistance

Council in May 1943. The "good cause" later proved to be the oppression of France's colonial peoples in Algeria and Indo-China, not to mention Stalinist participation in de Gaulle's government in 1945 and the reconstruction of French capitalism.

The Communists, imprisoned in French internment camps by the Daladier and then the Pétain governments, were now officially enemies of the Nazis and were at their mercy.

On October 20, 1941, a German commandant, Karl Hotz, was executed in Nantes by three young Communists. The Nazis immediately demanded 50 French lives in reprisal. Pierre Pucheu, minister of the interior in the Marshal Pétain's collaborationist government, was told to select 50 prisoners for execution. Pucheu rejected a first list of names of ex-soldiers, judging them to be "good Frenchmen," in favour of a second list made up of communist hostages.

These were PCF members, with the exception of Marc Bourhis, a Trotskyist, and his friend and comrade Pierre Guéguin, the mayor of the town of Concarneau and a member of the French CP since its foundation in 1920. He opposed the Stalin-Hitler pact like many other PCF members and sympathised with the Trotskyists. When Bourhis had an opportunity to escape from the internment camp, he decided to stay with Guéguin, fearful that he could be harmed or killed by the Stalinist prisoners if left alone. The presence of Trotskyists in the group of 27 prisoners executed with Guy Môquet by a Nazi firing squad in Chateaubriant was denied by the PCF leaders up to the 1990s.

The Stalinists prevented and stifled the development of a revolutionary socialist struggle in all the anti-fascist resistance movements, tying the workers, peasants and youth to their national bourgeoisies and their allies. The betrayal of the Spanish revolution of 1936 was the first example of this.

The Emergency Conference of the Fourth International (FI) in May 1940 provided a manifesto that gave essential guidance to the Trotskyists in the darkest years of the Nazi domination of Europe. Its opening remarks contain this paragraph: "The Fourth International turns not to the governments who have dragooned the peoples into the slaughter, nor to the bourgeois politicians who bear the responsibility for these governments nor to the labour bureaucracy which supports the warring bourgeoisie. The Fourth International turns to the workingmen and women, the soldiers and sailors, the ruined peasants and the enslaved colonial peoples. The Fourth International has no ties whatsoever with the oppressors, the exploiters, the imperialists. It is the world party of the toilers, the oppressed, and the exploited. This manifesto is addressed to them."

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