

France: The LCR sets a new political trap for the working class

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The Revolutionary Communist League (Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire—LCR) is responding to the disintegration of the Socialist Party in France with an initiative to create a new right-centrist party. In so doing, it is attempting to create a mechanism, urgently required by the French ruling class, to combat the growing radicalisation of workers and young people and prevent a new generation turning to revolutionary Marxism.

LCR spokesperson Olivier Besancenot announced the plans for a new party in the course of several interviews at the party's recent "summer university" in Port-Leucate. He stressed that the new party would be "anti-capitalist," but, unlike the LCR, would no longer claim any association with Trotskyism.

Besancenot told the press agency AFP that the LCR was opening a new page in its history. "The conception," he said, "is not to build a new Trotskyist party," but rather "an anti-capitalist party for all those who wish to develop something other than capitalism." The new organization must be "politically so virginal that it can include other horizons. A new political period requires a new party and a new program."

In a similar vein, he told the newspaper *Le Parisien*: "We want to bring together in a new formation all anti-capitalists and all those who advocate another society... What we propose is to join neither a second version of the LCR nor the old party with a facelift. The LCR should now be put behind us. It should open up a new page in its history, without denying its heritage. New political period, new party. What's the point of another Trotskyist grouping, alongside the other two? We are more ambitious. We are not content simply with a change of name. The period is not appropriate for small cultural revolutions."

Nobody should be deceived by the term "anti-capitalist." The task of the new party consists in defending the bourgeois order, which, following the near complete collapse of the country's Socialist and Communist parties, has lost its most important instruments for controlling the working class.

The Socialist Party has been in free-fall since losing, this spring, its third consecutive presidential election. Prominent party figures are deserting to the camp of President Nicolas Sarkozy, while the rest of the party is torn apart by fractional in-fighting even as it shifts further to the right. After tail-ending the Socialist Party for decades, France's once powerful Communist Party (CPF) has been reduced to a splinter organisation.

Under these circumstances the French ruling class urgently needs a party that poses as something sufficiently "left" as to not immediately lose the trust of a new generation, while it contains and dissipates the increasing militancy of the working class. This is the type of party the LCR is seeking to develop.

The new party will open its doors to political has-beens from the old bureaucratic apparatuses and to every variety of petty-bourgeois radical and muddlehead. It will be "anti-capitalist, feminist, ecological, internationalist and socialist," according to an appeal issued by the national leadership of the LCR in July, and will carry out "a common debate with all individuals, groups of activists and political currents... who

wish to pursue an anti-capitalist program in struggles and elections."

The term "anti-capitalist" can encompass a very broad political spectrum, including a significant faction within the camp of French bourgeois politics. Following decades of mass unemployment, welfare cuts and social polarization, capitalism has been so discredited amongst broad layers of society that every type of political demagogue—including those on the political right—is prepared to denounce "neo-liberalism," "undiluted capitalism," or the "dictatorship of the international financial markets."

Only the most obtuse social democrats are still prepared to openly defend capitalism. Today, the vast majority of "left" defenders of the bourgeois order hide themselves behind the mask of "anti-capitalism"—including disillusioned reformists, discredited union bureaucrats, aged Stalinists, and the feminists and ecologists so beloved of the LCR. Nor should one leave out the extreme right, which also poses as "anti-capitalist."

The designation "anti-capitalist" is so indeterminate and flexible that it can be used to spread a maximum of political confusion. It is the classic tag for a right-centrist party which nominally embraces socialism, while standing firmly on the soil of the bourgeois order; a party that abhors ideological clarity and is strictly opposed to the process of political clarification so necessary for the development of a genuinely revolutionary mass movement.

The building of a real anti-capitalist movement, i.e., a revolutionary socialist movement of the working class, can be carried out only by means of a continuing process of ideological and political delineation from the camp of the bourgeoisie and its opportunist hangers-on. It requires a Marxist party based on an internationalist and socialist program. This is the central lesson of the entire history of the workers' movement, and, in particular, the experience of the Russian October Revolution and the Fourth International.

The LCR, however, is vehemently opposed to such an approach. Besancenot bluntly told *Le Parisien* that the new party should not be an "elitist revolutionary avant-garde party." At the same time, it should have a national orientation. "The new leadership must correspond to the image and the colours of the country," he said.

The appeal issued by the LCR national leadership likewise stresses the national orientation of the new party. It appeals to all those "who wish to unite in a political framework which is organized, militant, national and democratic."

The real enemy of the new party is not capitalism, but revolutionary Marxism. While the new party will be open to forces well within the bourgeois political spectrum, it will relentlessly oppose all who stand to the left—denouncing them as "sectarians." Its most important task is to isolate the genuine Trotskyists.

The Trotskyist movement has considerable experience with such centrist organization. The Fourth International developed in the 1930s precisely in the struggle against centrism.

At that time, large numbers of workers turned away in disillusionment from the Stalinist and social democratic organizations, which in 1933 had capitulated to Hitler without a fight and were responsible for the devastating defeat of the German working class. Centrist organizations such as the SAP (Socialist Workers Party) in Germany, the POUM (Marxist Party of Workers' Unity) in Spain, and the PSOP (Socialist Workers and Peasants Party) led by Marceau Pivert in France were able to rapidly increase their size and influence. They served to head off the revolutionary struggles of the working class.

In the autumn of 1936 in Spain, the POUM went so far as to enter the bourgeois Catalanian Popular Front government at the peak of the revolutionary movement, thereby playing a substantial role in the victory of Franco and defeat of the Spanish proletariat.

The founding program of the Fourth International described these groups as "'left' appendages of Social Democracy or of the Comintern," which "have displayed a complete inability to make head or tail of the political situation and draw revolutionary conclusions from it."

It is noteworthy that the LCR is now expressly seeking to dissociate itself from Trotskyism. There are two reasons for this. First, the LCR regards even verbal adherence to Trotskyism as an obstacle to the opportunist project of the party-to-be.

Second, it is anxious to free itself from the Trotskyist tradition because it is adamantly opposed to a new generation—an increasingly radicalised generation looking for a revolutionary perspective—coming into contact with this tradition, which is the concentrated expression of all lessons arising from the strategic experiences of the revolutionary workers' movement in the course of the past century.

The LCR is quite conscious in this respect. In his interview with *Le Parisien*, Besancenot expressly refers to the emergence of a "new militant generation, which has come, for example, from the suburbs and is untainted by the political experiences of the past"—and which, according to Besancenot's intention, must remain "untainted" by an understanding of these experiences.

The enmity expressed by the LCR to Trotskyism is not new. Despite statements to the contrary, the LCR never was a Trotskyist party.

The international organisation to which the LCR is affiliated, the United Secretariat, formerly led by Michel Pablo and Ernest Mandel, broke with the program of the Fourth International in 1953 and threw over the principle of the political independence of the working class in favour of an opportunist adaptation to Stalinist and nationalist movements—from Mao, the Algerian FLN, Fidel Castro, Che Guevara and the Nicaraguan Sandinistas right up to Mikhail Gorbachev. The United Secretariat bears political responsibility for devastating defeats of the international working class.

The LCR emerged in the 1960s from a Stalinist student organization which had been expelled by the leadership of the French Communist Party and merged with the French section of the United Secretariat. It was much more influenced by the nationalist tradition of the Algerian FLN (National Liberation Front), which it actively promoted, than by Trotskyism.

Numerous figures who now play a leading role in French bourgeois politics, business and the media have passed through the organisation. For his part, Olivier Besancenot, the protégé of long-time LCR leader Alain Krivine, proudly boasts that he was never a Trotskyist and has as much respect for Che Guevara as for Trotsky.

During the general strike and student revolt of 1968, the LCR glorified the students as a new, revolutionary avant-garde and thereby helped isolate them from the working class, which was in turn betrayed by the Communist Party and the Stalinist-dominated CGT trade union. In the ensuing years, the party functioned as a fig leaf for the official "left," i.e., the alliance between the Socialist and Communist parties initiated by François Mitterrand at the beginning of the 1970s, which was the most important prop of the bourgeois order in France for the next three-and-a-

half decades.

The LCR often described itself as the "Gauche de la Gauche," the "left of the left"—an appropriate name, bearing in mind the role played by the party as a left cover for the official bourgeois "left" and the trade union bureaucracy.

The role of the party acquired new significance with the beginning of a new century, as broad layers of the working class turned their back on the official left parties and the country was rocked by a series of major strikes and waves of protest. In 2002, following five years of bitter experiences with the so-called "left" government led by Socialist Party leader Lionel Jospin, three million voters cast ballots in favour of the presidential candidates of the so-called "far left," including 1.2 million votes for Besancenot. In the election held in the spring of this year, Besancenot once again garnered 1.5 million votes.

The LCR reacted to this support from voters seeking a political alternative by turning them back into the arms of the official bourgeois parties. In 2002, the LCR called upon its voters to support the Gaullist candidate Jacques Chirac in the second round of presidential voting, and this year the party recommended a vote for the Socialist Party candidate Ségolène Royal.

For many years the LCR has pursued the goal of uniting the Communist Party, "left" Socialists and other nominally left organizations in the orbit of the Socialist Party into a new grouping. As recently as January 2006, the 16th Congress of the LCR called for the building of a unified movement incorporating all those parties and movements that had supported a "No" vote in the referendum on the European constitution. The role models for such an initiative were the Communist Refoundation (Rifondazione Comunista) in Italy and Lula's Workers Party in Brazil. In both countries, the sections of the United Secretariat joined these parties, and in Brazil a member of the United Secretariat's section became a minister in Lula's government.

During this period, the LCR developed into a crucial "left" prop of the bourgeois order in France. It defended the trade union bureaucracy when the latter sabotaged strike movements, and systematically sought to prevent workers and young people disgusted by the betrayals of the old reformist organizations from taking up a fresh and independent political orientation. The LCR bears direct responsibility for the fact that, after ten years of continuous social and political struggle, a right-winger such as Nicolas Sarkozy was able to exploit the bankruptcy of the official left and the absence of a genuine socialist alternative and come to power.

Sarkozy's election is a devastating political verdict on the policies of the LCR. In 2006, during the mass protests against the CPE first job contract, the LCR declared that pressure from the streets would force the Gaullist right wing onto the defensive and compel the Socialist Party to support the interests of the mass movement. Instead, the Socialist Party reacted to the pressure from below with a further shift to the right. The Communist Party, together with all the other organizations and individuals championed by the LCR as the basis for a new "left" movement, are clutching even more closely to the Socialist Party.

The policy of the United Secretariat has similarly collapsed in Brazil and Italy. Lula's government is regarded as a model by international financial circles, while Rifondazione Comunista sits in the Prodi government and supports its military deployments and attacks on pensions. Even the international magazine of the United Secretariat, *International Viewpoint*, was forced to admit: "The balance sheet of the participation of the Party of Communist Refoundation in the centre-left coalition led by Romano Prodi is catastrophic."

The radicalisation of new layers of workers and young people will largely take place outside of the control of the old bureaucratic apparatuses. The LCR fears that it will be left in the wake if it continues to campaign for an alliance with the discredited organisations circulating around the Socialist Party. This is behind the decision to establish a new

organization.

“We have reached a point in which one must open up a new chapter and base oneself on a new generation,” LCR leader Alain Krivine told *Libération*. “It is not an issue of rejecting all old comrades, but the construction will not take place via the ex—the ex-LCR, the ex CP, the ex-PSU, etc.”

The same newspaper quotes Besancenot: “Things were blocked from above and now we are trying it from the rank-and-file. We will not gather Buffet, Laguiller and Bové [leaders respectively of the Communist Party, Lutte Ouvrière and the anti-globalization movement] around one table, but rather speak with the nameless in the residential districts and local collectives.”

In undertaking its initiative for a new party, the LCR is indirectly recognizing that the working class has moved significantly to the left, and is itself responding by moving further to the right. It will no longer restrict its role to supporting and covering up for the betrayal of the old organizations, but is now offering its services to the bourgeoisie as a replacement—including possible participation in a bourgeois government.

In his interview with *Le Parisien*, Besancenot makes this quite clear. When asked, “Does the new organization intend to establish alliances, for example, with the Socialist Party,” Besancenot replied, “Let’s be clear: we are not afraid of power.”

Besancenot claims that the new initiative represents the opening of a new page in the LCR’s history. In reality, the organisation is trying to cover its tracks. Besancenot’s designation of the new project as “politically virginal” is bizarre. Such a description is hardly appropriate for a party which has for the past four decades prostituted itself to bourgeois political parties and repeatedly stabbed the working class in the back.

The World Socialist Web Site will resolutely oppose the attempt of the LCR to set a new trap for the working class. It will relentlessly criticize and expose the manoeuvres of the LCR, acquaint our readers with the rich political heritage and perspective of the Fourth International, and intensify the struggle for the construction of a genuine Trotskyist party in France as a section of the International Committee of the Fourth International.



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