

# France: Teachers resist Sarkozy's manipulation of Guy Môquet history

Pierre Mabut  
8 November 2007

President Sarkozy's first decree on taking office last summer was for the obligatory reading by teachers to their pupils of the last letter to his mother of 17-year-old Guy Môquet, who was executed by the Nazi occupiers on October 22, 1941. All lycée secondary schools were instructed to read out the letter on the "commemorative" date last month as an example of sacrifice and resistance for the nation. The education minister, Xavier Darcos, claimed 93 percent of the schools had carried out the instruction, but the overwhelming hostility from teachers makes this claim absurd.

Protesters demanding "liberate Guy Môquet, liberate Florimond Guimard" shouted down Darcos in his former school in the Dordogne, where he is a local mayor. Sarkozy is widely accused of manipulating the memory of Môquet for his own nationalist ends, while Guimard, a Marseille school teacher, has been arrested by police for protesting against the expulsion of an undocumented immigrant parent. Justice Minister Rachida Dati was also howled down when she tried to read the letter at a lycée in Villejuif in Paris. President Sarkozy, getting wind of the protests, cancelled his reading at the lycée Carnot in Paris, where Môquet was a pupil. He cited scheduling problems.

Môquet, a member of the youth movement of the French Communist Party (PCF), was arrested by French police in October 1940 for public agitation demanding the release of his father Prosper, a PCF National Assembly deputy who was rounded up after the PCF was made illegal because of its support of the Stalin-Hitler pact in August 1939.

It was only after the invasion of the Soviet Union by Hitler in June 1941 that the PCF officially entered the resistance movement against the Nazi occupation. Following the assassination of a German officer in

Nantes, Guy and 26 other prisoners of the collaborationist Vichy government (trade unionists, communist party members and two Trotskyists) were handed over to the Nazis for execution.

The denunciation of Sarkozy's manipulation of the memory of Guy Môquet for political ends was spelled out by the main teaching union SNES (Syndicat National de l'Enseignement du Second Degré), which called for a boycott. "How can we accept that the school becomes the place for the artificial creation of a 'Union Sacrée' (national union of all social classes in support of war aims—especially used in reference to World War I), by the uncritical means of a dictated ceremony." It accused Sarkozy of trying to create a "patriotic myth."

The SUD-education union in Limousin in central France also issued a principled statement: "Guy Môquet is thus presented as an example for the young. Obviously taken out of context, the young man executed by the Nazis embodies a youth ready to make the supreme sacrifice for the fatherland. At the moment when Sarkozy is aligning himself with Bush's foreign policy and when one of his ministers (Bernard Kouchner) speaks of war against Iran, this particular presentation of Guy Môquet is worrying."

The mobilisation against the government's diktats and manipulation of history in schools got another boost when the manager/coach of the French national rugby team, Bernard Laporte, decided to give a lesson in sacrifice for the nation by reading out the Môquet letter to the team just before the France vs. Argentina match during the rugby world cup in September. Laporte was appointed Minister of Sport before the tournament and was perceived to be trying to galvanise public opinion for the "commemorative" intervention in the schools. This, however, backfired on the

government.

Teachers in many schools reacted angrily to this sort of manipulation. Typical was the decision of teachers at the Robert de Luzarches lycée in Amiens, northern France. “We, the teachers at Robert de Luzarches, have collectively decided not to read this letter by Guy Môquet on October 22,” they announced in a statement. “We consider that the content of this letter has been manipulated in order to convey an extreme patriotic message. We refuse to allow this letter to be used as a political propaganda tool by removing it from its historical context and by participating in a ritual gathering a thousand times removed from the intimate concerns that this document covers. It is just because we are concerned to awaken our pupils’ consciousness, to refuse to channel their minds into a predetermined mould, that we in turn, are here demonstrating an act of resistance.”

The stand taken by teachers contrasted strongly with the weak-kneed attitude of the Socialist Party, which is falling into line behind Sarkozy on all major questions. It supported the reading but did not dare to do so openly. “The Socialist Party trusts teachers to make the right pedagogical choice that will restore the historical meaning to this letter. It is strongly advised that elected representatives of the PS do not take the place of teachers in the reading of this letter in schools.”

From the start, the French Communist Party (PCF) has twisted and turned only to wind up supporting the reading, which its National Secretary Marie-George Buffet had already “hailed” as positive.

“I understand that teachers are asking the question whether to read this letter or not”...it was necessary “to put it in its context.” “And if many parties of the left have criticised the ‘taking over’ of this symbol by Nicolas Sarkozy, I really don’t give a fig for these problems related to ‘taking over.’”

The PCF also issued a 16-page supplement to its daily paper *Humanité* devoted to Môquet’s life and once again distorting history. The editorial states: “We have prepared these pages with concern to replace the Guy Môquet letter in its context, to be useful to all those who, on reading it or hearing of October 22, would like to understand or help understand what led a young communist of 17, who only wanted to live, to die, executed by the Nazis after being turned over by the French police who, on the orders of the Vichy

government, collaborated with Hitler’s Germany.”

The Stalinists of the PCF have “placed the letter in its context” and sanctioned Sarkozy’s manoeuvre, having turned history on its head in the process. Môquet was of course, as the PCF knows, both a victim of the Vichy collaboration and that of the PCF itself with Hitler’s Germany through its support for the Stalin-Hitler pact. (See “Guy Môquet, Sarkozy and the Stalinist school of Falsification”)

The uproar caused by the Môquet incident has forced Sarkozy to backtrack on his order that the letter be read to students each year. Government spokesman Laurent Wauquiez announced the intention of “transforming this Guy Môquet Day into a day devoted to the youth resistance.” The sinister overtones of this step go hand in hand with the president’s policy to militarise France and the EU. Sarkozy’s equation of “the Iranian bomb or the bombing of Iran” must inevitably mean the militarisation of society, especially the youth, under the guise of “resistance” and “humanitarian interference” touted by his foreign minister, Bernard Kouchner.



To contact the WSWS and the  
Socialist Equality Party visit:

**[wsws.org/contact](http://wsws.org/contact)**