

French revisionist Pierre Lambert dies aged 87

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Pierre Lambert, the long-time leader of the French Organisation Communiste Internationaliste (OCI) and of today's Parti des Travailleurs (PT), died at age 87 on January 16 in Paris after a long illness.

Lambert was one of the last representatives of a generation that had joined the Fourth International during Trotsky's lifetime, playing a prominent role in the organisation in the period after the Second World War.

Born on June 9, 1920, the son of a Russian Jewish immigrant family in Paris, Pierre Boussel (his given name) joined the communist youth movement when he was just 14 years old. One year later, he was expelled because he had criticized Stalin's alliance with the French government of Pierre Laval. He became a member of the socialist youth movement, in which the Trotskyists were rapidly gaining influence, and was active in the Trotskyist movement during the war.

At the beginning of the 1950s, the Fourth International came under increasing pressure from a revisionist tendency, which attributed a progressive role to Stalinism, due to the nationalizations carried out in Eastern Europe. This tendency—led by Michel Pablo and Ernest Mandel—called for entry into the communist parties. If it had succeeded, this perspective would have led to the liquidation of the Fourth International.

It is to the credit of the majority of the French section that it energetically opposed this Pabloite revisionism. Prominent members, like Marcel Bleibtreu and Daniel Renard, wrote valuable contributions against the liquidationist course of the Pabloites. Pierre Lambert supported the party majority; however, no written contributions by him against Pabloism remain.

In 1953, the majority of the French PCI (only later calling itself the OCI) sided with the International Committee of the Fourth International, which had been established on the initiative of the American Socialist Workers Party (SWP) in order to defend the programme of the Fourth International against Pabloite revisionism. It was at this time that Lambert took a leading role in the French section.

However, by the end of the 1950s, Lambert's PCI was already showing symptoms of disorientation and demoralization. It interpreted General De Gaulle's return to power and the establishment of the Fifth Republic in 1958 as a Bonapartist coup d'état, and was enormously pessimistic regarding the fighting capacity of the working class; at times existing as a semi-underground movement in the following years.

At the beginning of the 1960s, the OCI opposed reunification with the Pabloites, which was then being advocated by the American Socialist Workers Party, and which the SWP finally carried out. However, the OCI played only a subordinate role in this fight—the political and theoretical struggle against reunification was predominantly led by the British Socialist Labour League (SLL) led by Gerry Healy.

In the course of the 1960s, the signs of a growing crisis in Lambert's OCI became more pronounced as the party placed a question mark over the International Committee's fight against Pabloism. Initially, this

manifested itself in its claim that the Fourth International had become moribund: that it had been destroyed by Pabloism and had to be rebuilt.

The British SLL vehemently opposed this contention. In 1967 it wrote to the OCI: "The future of the Fourth International is represented in the stored-up hatred and experience of millions of workers for the Stalinists and reformists who betray their struggles. The Fourth International must consciously fight for leadership to meet this need.... Only this struggle against revisionism can prepare the cadres to take the leadership of the millions of workers drawn into the struggle against capitalism and against the bureaucracy ... the living struggle against Pabloism and the training of cadres and parties on the basis of this struggle *was* the life of the Fourth International in the years since 1952" (*Trotskyism versus Revisionism*, vol. 5, London 1975, pp. 107-14).

On the eve of the great class struggles of 1968, the SLL also warned about the consequences of the OCI's sceptical standpoint: "Now the radicalisation of workers in western Europe is proceeding rapidly, particularly in France.... There is *always* a danger at such a stage of development that a revolutionary party responds to the situation in the working class not in a revolutionary way, but by an adaptation to the level of struggle to which the workers are restricted by their own experience under the old leadership—i.e., to the inevitable initial confusion. Such revisions of the fight for the independent party and the Transitional Programme are usually dressed up in the disguise of getting closer to the working class, unity of all those in struggle, not posing ultimatums, abandoning dogmatism, etc." (*ibid.*, pp. 113-14).

This warning went unheard. The revolts of 1968 propelled thousands of new, inexperienced members into the ranks of the OCI and its youth organisation (AJS), and the OCI leadership adapted itself to their state of confusion. The demand for a "united class front"—also criticised by the SLL in 1967—now became a formula with which the OCI adapted itself to the social democratic bureaucracy and led the newly won forces back to the old bureaucratic apparatuses.

There was no longer any fundamental difference between the views of the OCI and those of the Pabloites. The only difference was that the OCI oriented itself towards social democracy—its enmity toward Stalinism increasingly adapting itself to social democratic anticommunism—while the Pabloites maintained their orientation towards the Stalinist parties.

In 1971, the OCI broke with the International Committee, without clarifying the questions that had formed the basis for this split. For its part, the SLL concentrated increasingly on its national work in Britain and lost interest in clarifying international questions, although the OCI had moved much further to the right than could have been expected in the 1960s. The OCI then began to develop a specific form of political opportunism, which has been identified with Lambert's name since that time.

Characteristic of "Lambertism" is the rejection of the independent political mobilization of the working class under the banner of revolutionary Marxism. Instead, it strives to influence prominent representatives of the union and reformist party machineries. Lambert's

organization did not appeal to the working class, but sought to whisper in the ears of certain influential personalities.

Journalist Jamal Berraoui, at one time a member of Lambert's organization in Morocco, crystallised this in his obituary for the newspaper *Aujourd'hui le Maroc*. He writes: "Lambert, during great class battles, emphatically insisted, 'We are not the leadership of the masses'—he granted that role to the traditional apparatuses. Investigating the movement of the masses, opening up to them a united perspective by giving them appropriate watchwords, without substituting himself for the traditional leaderships and apparatuses—that was the line."

This line was created to provide a left cover for the reactionary bureaucratic apparatuses in times of crisis, to paralyse the working class and stabilise bourgeois rule. In this regard, Lambert was, without doubt, extremely "successful," as testified by the numerous obituaries in the French press.

"A skilful maneuverer, Pierre Lambert knew how to gather around him various energies and find the means to keep up a modest but, within its limits, effective organization," writes *Le Monde*. The paper points to Lambert's links to the Grand Orient Freemasons' lodge, at whose head in the 1970s stood Fred Zeller, who had once served as a secretary to Trotsky; the influence of the OCI in the union federation Force Ouvrière (FO), whose long-standing secretary Marc Blondel was a close friend of Lambert, as well as its control of the MNEF student organisation, which administered the students' social insurance scheme.

According to the newspaper *Libération*, Lambert is said to have also met regularly for discussions with the press baron Robert Hersant, and in 1995, on the eve of the mass protests over pension reforms, even to have attended a private dinner at the presidential palace along with other FO functionaries.

However, the most important result of Lambert's ingratiation with the reformist bureaucracy is surely the fact that numerous prominent Socialist Party members passed through his school. The most well-known among them is Lionel Jospin, who from 1997 to 2002 headed the French government, and in 2002 stood in the presidential elections. But he is certainly not the only one.

Jospin had joined the OCI as a student in the mid-1960s, and was then told to join the Socialist Party in 1971. There, he rapidly ascended in the ranks of those closest to party leader François Mitterrand, who following his election as president in 1981 ensured Jospin became first secretary of the party. Mitterrand, who kept all his closest co-workers under surveillance, certainly knew about Jospin's secret membership in the OCI and his close relations with Lambert, as independent sources have since confirmed.

The support of the OCI, which at the beginning of the 1970s had over several thousand members and whose youth organization Alliance des Jeunes pour le Socialisme (AJIS) could mobilize some tens of thousands, was of great importance for Mitterrand. This discredited bourgeois politician—who had served for a brief time in the Vichy regime and who was the minister of the interior and justice at the high point of the Algerian war—came to the leadership of the Socialist Party in 1971 and was seeking to provide it with left-wing credentials.

Mitterrand's goal was to provide a new, stable basis for bourgeois rule in France—which had been seriously shaken by the general strike and student protests of 1968—through an alliance with the Communist Party that he could dominate; something at which he ultimately succeeded. The OCI glorified this "alliance of the left" as a "workers united front" and attacked anyone who criticized it from the left.

When relations between the OCI and Mitterrand finally cooled, Jospin and the other OCI members who had joined the Socialist Party in 1971 not only remained; in 1986 a whole wing of Lambert's organization, under Jean Christophe Cambadélis, the leader of its student work, moved into Mitterrand's camp. Cambadélis has sat in the National Assembly

(parliament) for 10 years and today is one of the most influential figures in the Socialist Party hierarchy.

In the winter of 1995/96, when a strike by railway and public service workers lasted for several weeks, shaking the Gaullist regime of Jacques Chirac, the ruling elite looked to these people in order to bring the situation under control. In 1997, when Lionel Jospin emerged as prime minister, the French government had at its head a man who for approximately 20 years had worked under the discipline of an allegedly Trotskyist movement.

Jospin's role was to exploit his left-wing image in order to bring the working class under control, while at the same time pursuing a policy of privatisation and welfare cuts, which corresponded to the interests of finance capital. The result was devastating. The widespread disenchantment only profited the ultra-rightist National Front of Jean Marie Le Pen, who then beat Jospin in the first round of the 2002 presidential elections and went on to challenge Chirac in the second round.

In the meantime, Lambert had turned to a new project, founding the Parti des Travailleurs (PT) in 1991. Although this party is controlled by the former OCI, it stresses that it is not a Trotskyist organisation; with the former OCI presenting itself as the Courant Communiste Internationaliste (International Communist Current) alongside social democrats and Stalinists as a tendency within the PT. With the establishment of the PT, the OCI has, to a certain extent, created its own bureaucratic apparatus, which it can influence.

The target group of the PT is not ordinary workers but functionaries, who for one or another reason have become disenchanted with the Socialist or Communist party hierarchies—usually because their careerist aspirations have not been fulfilled. In the last presidential election campaign, the PT styled itself as the representative of the interests of some 36,000 French mayors—a mass of plots and corruption. At the centre of its election programme, it placed a chauvinist-tinged campaign against the European Union, which was declared responsible for all the evils of French society.

Lambert's supporters still exert wide influence in the FO trade union, even if it is no longer the same as in the Blondel era.

Lambert's influence is not limited to France. In North Africa, Latin America, Turkey and other countries, his supporters follow the model of their mentor, working inside the apparatuses of the reformist parties and the trade unions, and often on their right wing. It is no coincidence that the name Parti des Travailleurs (Workers Party) is identical to that of Lula's party in Brazil. Lambert's Brazilian followers played an important role in the establishment of the party of the present Brazilian president, and have proved to be loyal members in its ranks, defending the party machinery against every criticism from the left.

Lambert's life and heritage contain important lessons for the international working class. They illustrate the price of political opportunism. This is not merely a matter of differing opinions or of mistakes. In times of crisis, opportunism becomes the last line of defence of bourgeois rule.

The *World Socialist Web Site* will shortly be publishing a more extensive critical evaluation of Lambert's life and his significance.



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