

France: Pierre Lambert's funeral underscores OCI's long-standing opportunism

Our correspondent
31 January 2008

On January 25 Pierre Lambert, the long-time leader of France's Organization communiste internationaliste (Internationalist Communist Organisation—OCI) and today's Parti des travailleurs (Workers Party—PT), was buried in the famed Père Lachaise cemetery in Paris.

Some two thousand people accompanied the funeral procession from the gates of the cemetery to the crematorium. A group of young people led the procession holding four red flags bearing the hammer and sickle. Lambert's coffin, when it was taken out of the hearse, was draped in the same flag.

Alongside representatives of the PT and its international affiliates, a large delegation from the Force Ouvrière (Worker's Force—FO) trade union federation also attended the ceremony, as did a number of prominent figures in the Socialist Party.

In fact, nearly the entire national leadership of FO—France's third biggest union federation—turned up for the funeral. The delegation was headed by the union's acting general secretary, Jean-Claude Mailly, as well as two of his predecessors—André Bergeron (1963-1989) and Marc Blondel (1989-2004).

The large participation of the FO leadership at Lambert's funeral confirms that the latter's organization, despite its occasional lip-service to Trotskyism, played and continues to play a significant role within the conservative trade union apparatus.

The FO emerged in 1947 as a right-wing split from the Stalinist-dominated Confédération Générale du Travail (CGT). It always defended a national-reformist course and, in collaboration with the CGT and other union federations, has played a major role in suffocating the mass strike movements that have rocked France in recent years.

Lambert, who was expelled from the CGT in 1950, worked full-time for FO in the 1950s. After the Lambert-led OCI broke with the Trotskyist movement—the International Committee of the Fourth International—in 1971, it developed

into an important political prop of the Socialist Party under François Mitterrand. During this same period OCI member Lionel Jospin secretly joined Mitterrand's party. Jospin eventually became one of Mitterrand's most trusted advisors and, ultimately, France's prime minister.

The OCI was also able to extend its influence within FO and prominent members worked full-time in its apparatus. Lambert became the close advisor of Bergeron and later Blondel, and it remains unclear whether the two trade union leaders were themselves OCI members or not.

There is no indication that the OCI ever challenged the reformist orientation of FO or made any attempt to steer the organisation in a revolutionary direction. Lambert justified his support for the reformist and opportunist policies of the trade unions by raising the mutual independence of political parties and unions to the status of a universal principle, or to put it differently, by declaring political criticism of the trade union bureaucracy impermissible.

In his funeral speech, Patrick Hébert, the head of FO in the Loire Atlantique region and a leading member of Lambert's PT, concentrated on this question.

Based on Lambert's experiences in the Stalinist-controlled CGT in the 1940s, he drew the conclusion "that it is necessary to fight in all circumstances for respect of the mutual independence of parties and trade unions," Hébert declared.

He continued: "So it was that in 1947, at the congress of the Trotskyist organization, Lambert had an amendment voted on that amended the positions of the Communist International, called the Twenty-one Conditions [officially, the "Conditions of Admission to the Communist International"]. It changed in particular articles 9 and 16 [insisting on the subordination of trade union work to party policies and centralized international party organisation] so as to substitute for them the reciprocal recognition of parties and trade union. This orientation remained central to him all his life on the trade union, as well as on the political level."

The ‘independence’ of the unions from socialist politics means, in practice, their subordination to the pro-capitalist bureaucracies and through them, the ruling elite itself. Lenin, Trotsky and the Communist International leadership were responding in part to the bitter experience of Social Democracy in Germany, whose right-wing union leaders had helped lead the German working class into the slaughterhouse of World War I and participated in the betrayal of the revolutionary opportunities of 1918-19.

Hébert concluded his remarks by once again making clear that any political criticism of the trade unions was impermissible: “Whatever our differences of opinion on this or that question and however important they are, these differences must for the moment be secondary, subordinated to the survival of the trade union movement, free and independent of any party, of any state, of any government and any party.”

The most prominent Socialist Party figure at Lambert’s funeral was Jean-Luc Mélenchon, who has represented Essonne in the Senate since 1986. Mélenchon joined the OCI in 1968 and played an important role in its student organization. In 1976 he joined the Socialist Party, supported Mitterrand and was later active in various left parliamentary groupings. In 2000 he joined the Lionel Jospin government as an undersecretary of state, and in 2005 opposed the European constitution. One year later he supported Laurent Fabius against Ségolène Royal as presidential candidate of the Socialist Party.

Mélenchon, who sported the Socialist Party symbol, a red rose, told the newspaper *Libération* that he had no regrets regarding his apprenticeship in the OCI: “As for me, I’m not ashamed of those three years in my life! After all we Trotskyists fought against Stalinism, Maoism and all these horrors. We didn’t assassinate anyone.”

Another prominent Socialist Party member in attendance at the funeral was Gérard Filoche, who was attached to the party’s national office between 2000 and 2005. Filoche was a member of the Pabloite Ligue communiste révolutionnaire (Revolutionary Communist League—LCR) for 25 years and led a minority group within the organisation alleged to have had links to Lambert’s OCI. In 1995 he joined the Socialist Party together with 150 other LCR members and was immediately accepted into the party’s national leadership.

Filoche justified his attendance at the funeral with the words: “Pierre Lambert attended the funerals of several friends of mine. It was only right that I should be present at his. He was a true militant.”

Notable for his absence at the funeral was Jean-Christophe Cambadélis, who led the student work of the OCI in the 1970s and was part of the organisation’s national leadership until 1986. He then went on to join the Socialist Party with

around 400 supporters, and was regarded as one of Jospin’s closest allies. Cambadélis has been a deputy for the 19th District in Paris since 1988 and ranks as one of the Socialist Party’s political heavyweights.

On his Internet blog Cambadélis paid tribute to Lambert: “The man was seductive, his strength of character incontestable and he was much more charming in private than one would have assumed from his public activities.”

Cambadélis explained Lambert’s support for Mitterrand and FO on the basis of his enmity for Stalinism. Lambert was convinced “that the main obstacle to the ‘proletarian revolution’ was Stalinism ... On this basis one can understand why he was involved in sending some members into organisations that sought to challenge the PCF’s [French Communist Party’s] supremacy within the left. Because the Trotskyists did not have the capacity to do so.”

Cambadélis concluded by noting that Lambert was “a reference of my youth and not a shameful sickness to hide.”

Lionel Jospin refrained from commenting on Lambert’s death. Jospin was a member of the OCI for twenty years under Lambert’s leadership and then made a successful career for himself in the Socialist Party, becoming head of the French government in 1997. He did not attend the funeral, nor did he make any response to newspaper inquiries. An attendee at the funeral told *Libération*: “Based on the fact that he had been a secret member for twenty years long and had become a real friend of the old man [Lambert], Lionel really could have come.”

The tributes paid Lambert by the FO bureaucracy and prominent SP members underline the extent to which the French ruling elite has been dependent on the support of the OCI and other opportunist ‘left’ forces since the great class conflicts of 1968. The WSWS will post further material and articles addressing the historical and political background to these issues, which contain vital lessons for the struggles to come in the 21st century.



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