

France: LCR leader Daniel Bensaïd reassures Socialist Party of his collaboration

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Daniel Bensaïd of the Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire (LCR) and Henri Weber of the Socialist Party (PS) were the two main speakers at a forum held at Socialist Party headquarters in Paris February 28. The forum was part of a series billed as contributing to the renovation of the PS after its defeats in the presidential and legislative elections last year.

Henri Weber and Daniel Bensaïd, together with Alain Krivine, were co-founders of the LCR in 1969. Weber edited the LCR weekly *Rouge* and its journal *Critique communiste*. In 1986 he joined the Socialist Party. He was elected PS senator in 1995 and European deputy in 2004. He is at present a member of the political bureau of the Socialist Party responsible for the universities and is the director of its magazine *Revue Socialiste*. Bensaïd, a philosophy professor at the University of Paris VIII, is one of the LCR's leading theoreticians and a leading member of the Pabloite United Secretariat, to which the LCR is affiliated.

The LCR claims to be building a new "anti-capitalist party," which is independent of the Socialist Party and hostile to its neo-liberal policies. The meeting at the Socialist Party headquarters exposed this claim as fraud. This was not a dispute between political enemies, but a chat between personal and political friends who, while practising a division of labour, have no insurmountable disagreements.

From the start and throughout, the participants were at ease with each other, laughing readily at each other's jokes, addressing each other by the familiar "tu" (you) and the occasional "comrade." Bensaïd showed no signs of embarrassment at being addressed in this way by two unabashed defenders of the capitalist system—Weber and Alain Bergougneux, another leading PS member on the platform.

Under the subject title "The idea of Revolution in the 21st Century," this forum was manifestly a session designed to begin working out how the PS and the LCR would collaborate in a period of developing social and political upheavals. At a point in the debate where the question of the support by the PS for the attacks of the right-wing Nicolas Sarkozy on pensions, and the Plural Left government's privatisations when in office, might have caused some friction, Bensaïd said: "We are not going to get into a polemic: that isn't the atmosphere of the meeting."

Weber is one of many who have passed through the opportunist school of the LCR and joined an upwardly mobile elite that has been able to enrich itself at the expense of the working class. Far from being rejected as renegades, as this event showed, the LCR leadership retains strong bonds of friendship and mutual assistance to this layer reaching into the heart of the French capitalist class. This explains to a great extent the extremely favourable treatment received by the leaders of the LCR in the media.

Last year, Weber married his partner of 34 years, Fabienne Servan-Schreiber, and hosted an extravagant ceremony with 800 guests at the Cirque d'hiver, venue of many past rallies of the political left. Amongst those present were former PS prime minister Lionel Jospin, defeated 2007 PS presidential candidate Ségolène Royal and Bernard Kouchner, who subsequently left the PS when Sarkozy was elected and now serves as the latter's foreign minister.

Also present at the affair were two other PS leaders who have joined Sarkozy's administration: Martin Hirsch and Jean-Pierre Jouet. On October 2, 2007, *Le Monde* reported the presence of the bankers Bruno Roger (Lazard's), Philippe Lagayette (JP Morgan) and Lindsay Owen-Jones, head of L'Oréal. Also among the celebrity guests was the former model and singer Carla Bruni, now married to the French president.

Weber's main contribution to the recent forum was a panegyric to the forces of the market, a euphemism for capitalism. Basing himself on a Swedish Social-Democratic dictum supposedly coined in 1933, "the market is a good servant but a very bad master," Weber went into raptures: "It's the main modern productive force, freedom of initiative, freedom to be an entrepreneur, freedom to innovate, freedom to manage, freedom to exchange, so it's a good servant and those who can make it work for them can only congratulate themselves."

Bensaïd's old friend continued with a diatribe against revolutionary socialism: "The entire historical innovation of Social-Democracy during the last century was to master the market forces. That's the difference between us and Daniel Bensaïd and his friends, that's been our conflict with the revolutionaries for over a century.... In order to master the economy it is not necessary to destroy economic freedoms, it is not necessary to collectivise businesses, it is not necessary to eradicate the market in favour of the plan.... And every time that this has been done it has created catastrophes."

Alain Bergougneux contributed to this attack on Marxist socialism, saying that it condoned violence.

Bensaïd left these crude distortions of history unanswered. He did not rise to the challenge of demonstrating the social and political crimes of reformist social democracy in the twentieth century. He might have mentioned that European social democracy led the working class into the slaughterhouse of World War I or that the German social democrats were complicit in the murder of the revolutionary socialists Rosa Luxembourg and Karl Liebknecht. More recently, he could have dealt with the active role played by François Mitterrand and Socialist Party prime minister Guy Mollet in the brutal suppression of the Algerian revolt against colonial oppression. Or Lionel Jospin's insidious role in privatising public companies and

destroying jobs.

Bensaïd remained quiet too about the Socialist Party's present support for the militarisation of Europe and the build-up of France's armed forces, including nuclear weaponry, for deployment in the interests of French imperialism throughout the world. He made no critique of the Socialist Party's support for US imperialism's occupation of Iraq, its participation in the occupation by NATO of Afghanistan and its contribution to US and EU threats against Iran. Bernard Kouchner has intimated that France may be willing to take part in a military intervention. The PS is entirely complicit in the neo-colonialist drive of the great powers to rob the peoples of the gas- and oil-rich lands of central Asia and the Middle East of their natural resources.

This reporter directly asked Bensaïd about the attitude of the LCR to the Socialist Party. Bensaïd attempted an elaborate verbal pirouette. "That is a directly political question on relations with the Socialist Party. You know the formula: to eat with the devil you need a long spoon, and even if the PS is only a *diablotin* [little devil], for the moment the spoon is not long enough. This does not mean that we shall never dine together, but first it's going to be necessary to work on the spoon, and, to put it another way, that with a different relationship of forces it is clear that when we speak of independence [from the PS] it means that for the moment we will not participate in any political responsibilities. Unity of action, that's another question, we are completely available...if it is to do something about the war or the *sans papiers* [undocumented immigrants]."

This is a crude cover-up for the PS: it is out of the question that it would mobilise a movement in opposition to French and European militarism and the present operations in the Middle East and Central Asia. Also, the PS election programme of selective immigration has not been denounced in any campaign of the LCR. This would be an obstacle perhaps to adjustments in the "spoon" in order to enable the LCR to participate as a left cover in a future plural left government.

Bensaïd continued: "We don't want to be in the situation of being a cover as was the case with *Rifondazione Comunista* in relation to Prodi." *Rifondazione Comunista*, with the participation of the LCR's Italian sister party, joined the bourgeois government of Romano Prodi in 2006 and fully supported its slashing of pension rights, the sending Italian troops to Afghanistan and the strengthening of an American military base in Italy.

However, Bensaïd sought to reassure his PS audience that such considerations would not prevent future political alliances with their party: "In the present state of affairs, in the immediate future, until things shift, we want to have a relationship of friendly dialogues, but we will not go that far."

He added that "since the municipal elections are on, this does not, on the other hand, exclude, if there are situations where the election goes into the second round and we obtain over 5 percent, there will perhaps be some situations where we will propose the merging of lists proportionate to the results in the first round. For the moment, according to what we hear, the MoDem [centre-right party of François Bayrou] is rather the priority [shuffling and muffled objections in the audience]."

Bensaïd's purpose as invited guest of the Socialist Party was to provide assurances that the LCR had no revolutionary perspectives for the twenty-first century. He told the audience that he considered himself a Leninist rather than a Trotskyist, and tried to reduce Lenin to a vulgar opportunist only interested in the expediency of the politics of the day. "There is an historical process with Trotsky, which there is

not with Lenin," he stated. "Trotsky projects himself into the future; for Lenin, the central category of his politics is the present."

When Weber pointed out that national economies were completely integrated into the world economy, Bensaïd defended the nation-state and proposed a reformist, Keynesian economic policy as a basis for mutual collaboration. He reproached right and left French governments because "they have not maintained the equilibrium between state power and the market. They reinforced market mechanisms. That's where we disagree. If we could manage Keynesian procedures, if it were possible, we could go some way together."

Bensaïd's ambitions for Europe are minimalist: "We are not anti or against, but social and fiscal harmonisation, not equalisation, is a precondition for us." He suggested that Venezuela's bourgeois nationalists showed the way and said that the nation could be a point of leverage for movements against the EU's economic liberalism.

Bensaïd is far from seeing the globalisation of production and the world labour market as the basis for the international unification of the world working class as a revolutionary force. His pessimistic, petty-bourgeois social outlook was exposed most graphically when he described the millions joining the workforce in Asia and other parts of the world as a factor that would make social revolution impossible for a long time to come.

"The twentieth century," he said, "ended with a great historical defeat of the politics of emancipation. It's despairing to say that. It's a defeat we are far from getting away from. Perhaps we will, but no one can guarantee it, and anyway, the irruption into the globalised market of hundreds of millions of workers practically without social protection and without social rights is going lastingly to weigh down on and pull down even elementary living conditions and negotiations."

Finally Bensaïd reassured his PS audience that the LCR has no intention of educating the youth in Marxist theory and is actually hostile to it: "The Besancenot generation are against Le Pen, for them the Socialist Party is no good, they're for the postman [Besancenot] and ready to fight, after that everything else remains to be done.... If you give them a class on the Russian Revolution, they're bored silly."

Bensaïd's role and that of his party is to keep the working class tied to the social-democratic, Stalinist and trade union bureaucracies and prevent the emergence of a genuine revolutionary socialist party in France.



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