

France: LCR signals willingness to ally with Socialist Party

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10 June 2008

On May 31, the French news magazine *Marianne* published a debate between the presidential candidate of the Socialist Party (PS) in the 2007 elections, Ségolène Royal, and Olivier Besancenot, the Revolutionary Communist League's (LCR) spokesman and former presidential candidate. In response to a series of questions in the course of the interview, Besancenot signaled that he would consider participation in a PS government.

The debate comes as the PS struggles to profit from and simultaneously contain growing popular bitterness towards the political establishment and anger against the conservative Gaullist president, Nicolas Sarkozy.

Sarkozy's electoral promises to increase working people's purchasing power have been shattered by soaring prices for fuel and food, leading to a wave of strikes by fishermen, truckers and farmers. At the same time, the Gaullist president is pushing ahead with austerity policies, provoking strikes and protests in various sectors of the economy, including shipping, transport and public service. His approval rating has plunged to 35 percent according to recent opinion polls.

Royal made clear in *Marianne* that she was aware of the serious risks that the discrediting of Sarkozy posed to all bourgeois parties. She said: "People were fooled by the energy of the speeches of Nicolas Sarkozy, who said: 'You will see, vote for me and I'll fix everything because I'm a superman!' Today, despair about these promises risks discrediting, if we are not careful, all forms of political power."

She and Besancenot were at pains to stress their readiness to work together. When *Marianne* asked Besancenot if he saw a debate with Royal as having an element of "combat," Besancenot replied: "No, no, I came with the idea of debating." Royal immediately added, "There is such a thing as creative confrontation."

Besancenot made it clear that he sought to work with the PS, saying, "Let's speak concretely: how do we start, where we are, with our disagreements, to build a majority, massive, solid front to respond to the attacks of a government which

seeks to set the one against the other? [...] We can have different propositions, but we have first to resist Sarkozy's 55 free market reforms. For that, we must be welded together and united in mobilization."

Royal sought to demonstrate the compatibility of her policies with Besancenot's rhetoric. In response to Besancenot's praise of anarchism and local control of state revenues, Royal absurdly maintained that her initiative, as president of the Poitou-Charentes region, to grant partial control over municipal spending to high schools proved that she was a "revolutionary." However, Royal added that it was possible to "build a coherent opposition to Nicolas Sarkozy without being in agreement on alternative solutions."

At the conclusion of the interview, *Marianne* asked Besancenot whether "to assure a left victory in 2012, the LCR is ready to call for a PS vote, or even to participate, after a victory, in a PS government?"

Besancenot replied: "Me, I'm not obsessed by 2012. We contest the hegemony of the PS on the left and we call for our independence. [...] However, going into a government of the anti-capitalist left which puts free market economy in question, I'm not against it."

Commenting on the prospects for a united left, Royal said: "We need a highly attractive PS. I'm not satisfied with a party which has so few adherents. Everyone is welcome in the fight to construct a new world. But if, rather than taking on all the responsibilities of power, some want to remain in struggles [against Sarkozy's social cuts], it's their choice and I respect it."

Besancenot responded: "Don't worry, we are not resigning ourselves to be only in struggles [...] If you had been elected president, your government would have had a political opposition to its left which would have supported what was good in your program and, for the rest, would have managed to make it advance by repeated kicks in the behind."

Besancenot's comments make clear the class-collaborationist character of the pressure politics espoused

by the LCR leadership. They also shed light on the nature of the demand for an “anti-capitalist left,” whose lack of reference to Trotsky or revolutionary socialism is intended to allow for compromises with all sorts of political forces.

The LCR is currently preparing to dissolve itself into a New Anti-Capitalist Party (NPA), whose aim is to gather all the disaffected forces to the left of the PS—in the so-called “far left,” among sections of the French Communist Party (PCF), within university circles, etc.—into a broad, politically amorphous party which will seek to intervene in French bourgeois politics. The perspective of the NPA’s founders in the LCR, in complete contradistinction to that of revolutionary Marxism, is for a party to pressure bourgeois politicians to govern in a manner acceptable to the oppressed classes of capitalist society.

Significantly, the LCR’s campaign for the NPA is accompanied by its adoption of Che Guevara as a symbol of the movement and the junking of the LCR’s past Trotskyist pretensions. In March of last year, Besancenot publicly declared that he had never been a Trotskyist.

The LCR’s campaign has met with a considerable response from the corporate media, which is granting Besancenot substantial public exposure and airtime. As a result, his approval ratings in bourgeois polls have soared. A May 2008 Ifop poll found him the third most popular left politician, in front of Royal herself. To the PS, desperate to reestablish a measure of political credibility, an alliance with the LCR offers a means of refurbishing its credentials with left voters.

Though it is the French bourgeoisie’s preferred “left” governing party, the PS has never truly recovered from its humiliating defeat in the first round of the 2002 presidential elections, which dealt a major blow to illusions in the PS as a political alternative to the bourgeois right.

Hostile to the right-wing social policy and numerous privatizations carried out by the Socialist Party-led government of Prime Minister Lionel Jospin, the left vote in 2002 split between the PS, the supposedly Trotskyist “far left,” Jean-Pierre Chevènement’s now-defunct Civil Block, the Greens, and the Communist Party. Both the right-wing presidential incumbent Jacques Chirac and the neo-fascist candidate Jean-Marie Le Pen beat Jospin, the PS candidate, who failed to advance to the second round of the election.

At that time, the *World Socialist Web Site* issued an open letter to the LCR and the other parties calling themselves Trotskyist—Lutte Ouvrière and the Parti des Travailleurs—calling for a working class boycott of the second round of the presidential elections, which offered voters a choice between two right-wing bourgeois candidates, Chirac and Le Pen.

The LCR rejected this principled line and instead adopted

the position of the French establishment, calling for a vote for Chirac. This action—and the political cover the LCR has offered to the trade union bureaucracy as it betrayed mass strike movements against government austerity policies in 2003, 2006, and 2007—has led a section of the PS to consider the possibility that the LCR might be useful to them.

Especially since the election of Sarkozy last year, the PS has actively felt out the LCR leadership, and contacts between the PS and LCR have come increasingly into the open. Last December, Henri Weber, a top-ranking ex-LCR member of the PS, met with LCR leader Alain Krivine amid public praise for Besancenot by several PS heavyweights.

At the time, *Le Monde* wrote an article entitled “The Question of Alliances is Posed,” pointing out that the PS could not hope to return to power without further assistance from a party to its left.

Referring to the 1971 Epinay Congress, where the PS was formed based on an understanding that it would rely on an alliance with the PCF, *Le Monde* wrote: “The PCF no longer exists, electorally speaking (1.3 percent for Buffet in 2007 versus 15.3 percent for Georges Marchais in 1981). It’s the same for the Greens... The left can no longer hope to return to power with the alliances of the ‘Epinay cycle.’”

The idea of allying with the LCR in an attempt to regain government power is somewhat controversial in PS circles. Supporters of Paris Mayor Bertrand Delanoë, Royal’s main rival for the leadership of the PS, have taken to calling her “Che’golène Royal,” in mocking reference to her attempts to pass herself off as a radical. These sections of the PS favor an alliance with the right-wing bourgeois politician François Bayrou and his Democratic Movement (MoDem).

Nonetheless, elements of the PS are clearly considering the idea. According to *Le Monde*, after Besancenot’s May 11 appearance on France 2 TV’s “Vivement dimanche” show, PS National Secretary François Hollande asked Paris representative Daniel Vaillant to study “the impact that the formation of a radical pole” could have on French politics. Vaillant said he would “closely study” the LCR’s attempts to form the NPA.

Vaillant told *Le Monde*: “In 1974, François Mitterrand gave Lionel Jospin a mission to observe our relations with the Communist Party. His work turned out to be very useful.” In fact, it was so useful that it led to the electoral alliance between the PS and the PCF that allowed Mitterrand to win the presidency in 1981.



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