

War in Georgia: French LCR mimics Sarkozy's foreign policy

Balkanisation of the Caucasus

Peter Schwarz**13 September 2008**

The true class orientation of a party is often revealed in the way it reacts to important political events—by its ability to evaluate new developments and to provide a correct political orientation. Judging the reaction of the French Ligue communiste révolutionnaire (LCR) to the recent crisis in Georgia on this basis, it becomes clear that its view of foreign policy largely coincides with that of the country's ruling elite.

The LCR, which was founded in 1969, is presently engaged in transforming itself into the “New Anti-capitalist Party” (NPA). It presents the NPA as a socialist alternative to bourgeois politics, which is completely independent of the discredited Socialist Party. But the LCR's reaction to the war in Georgia differs only slightly from that of the French government, which also coincides with that of the Socialist Party.

The first thing to notice is that the LCR attaches hardly any significance to a political event that has dominated the headlines for days and which raises the dangerous possibility of an armed conflict between the two largest nuclear powers, Russia and the US. Looking at their web site, which covers social and trade union questions on a daily basis and reports extensively on the activities of LCR spokesman Olivier Besancenot, all that can be found on the war in the Caucasus is one short communiqué, scarcely two dozen lines in length. And this is so well hidden that it can only be found using the site's search function.

The content of the LCR statement echoes the attitude taken by those European governments that were alarmed by the outbreak of hostilities in the Caucasus and supported French President Nicolas Sarkozy, who negotiated a cease-fire in his capacity as president of the EU Council. The LCR adopts the same pose of non-partisanship and apparent desire for peace that Sarkozy and the European Union also display, painting their role in the rosiest colours.

Solomon-like, the LCR states, “The reasons for this war are various and the wrong-doing is shared,” and then assigns an equal measure of responsibility to all sides involved.

Writing understandingly about Georgia's unprovoked attack on South Ossetia, which unleashed the war, the LCR states, “The offensive, probably a poor calculation, unleashed by the Georgians in charge, was motivated both by the desire to establish respect for the territorial integrity of a state with disputed borders and to assert themselves politically and militarily in relation to their Russian

neighbour.”

The LCR accuses the Russian leadership of wanting “to show the European Union and the United States that the country is once again an imperialist power of the first order, claiming the role of regional gendarme, which regards the NATO membership of several former Warsaw Pact states and regions as a threat.”

And as far as the responsibility of NATO is concerned, the LCR writes with clear understatement: “It is in this regard that the responsibility of the Western leaders comes into play, who have decided to expand NATO, which Georgia wants to join.”

Finally, the LCR attributes great similarities to the ruling powers in Russia and Georgia: “Both are ultra-nationalist, authoritarian and militarist, and the majority of the population of these countries have nothing to gain from such a conflict.”

The communiqué ends with a general call for the fraternisation of the peoples: “The interests of the world of work are the same across all borders. Fraternity must prevail, in that the right of all peoples to self-determination is respected.... What is necessary is the construction of a movement of international solidarity between peoples.”

Such a call for “international understanding”, which is essentially pacifistic, is completely compatible with the foreign policy line of Sarkozy and his foreign minister, Bernard Kouchner.

The LCR is suppressing all the essential questions: The catastrophic consequences of the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the associated enflaming of national conflicts, which are then manipulated and exploited by the great powers; the aggressive penetration of American and European imperialism into the oil and gas reserves of the Caspian Sea and Central Asia, and the associated military encirclement of Russia; the responsibility of the US and its Georgian puppet Saakashvili, who provoked the Caucasus war with a night attack on the South Ossetian capital Tskhinvali; and finally, the complicity of France, Germany and the other European powers, which are pursuing their own strategic interests in the region, and, regardless of tactical differences, have clearly sided with Washington.

Obviously, the Russian regime of Vladimir Putin and Dmitry Medvedev deserves neither support nor trust. It represents the interests of the criminal, *nouveaux riches* ruling class, which has destroyed and plundered the Soviet Union and which suppresses the working class. But by blurring the causes of the war in the

Caucasus, attributing responsibility equally to all parties, and linking this to general appeals for “international understanding,” the LCR disarms the working class in the face of grave dangers posed by the aggressive policies of US and European imperialism. It likewise lends credibility to the policies of the French government, which is hiding its imperialist aims behind generalised clichés about peace, fraternisation of the peoples and self-determination.

It is not the first time that Sarkozy’s foreign policy has been supported by the LCR. When Kosovo split away from Serbia, strongly encouraged by French Foreign Minister Kouchner, the LCR supported this move without reservation.

Incidentally, Kouchner is an old acquaintance of LCR founder Alain Krivine. In the 1960s, both sat together in the leadership of the Vietnam solidarity committee CVN (Comité Vietnam national). Kouchner later joined the Socialist Party, then switching to Sarkozy’s camp after his electoral success. Krivine remains one of the central leaders of the LCR.

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The LCR communiqué is dated August 12, five days after the Georgian attack on Tskhinvali. Since then, for nearly one month, there has been no further statement on the Georgia conflict, although the crisis has escalated and the French president has played an extremely active role. This silence is also a form of complicity.

The LCR newspaper *Rouge* of September 4 (there was no paper published in August) contains a further short article on the Caucasus conflict, albeit one that was not written by the paper itself but comprises excerpts from the Russian group Vpered (Forwards).

Vpered denotes the war in the Caucasus as a conflict between two imperialist blocks, thereby equating Russia and the US. Obviously anxious to demarcate themselves from the Putin regime, they write: “We reject any solidarity with Russian imperialism and any support for the state of Putin and Medvedev.”

At the same time, Vpered professes its “complete and unconditional solidarity with the people of South Ossetia,” supporting the “right of South Ossetia to self-determination, including separation from Georgia and the creation of an independent state or to unification with North Ossetia as part of the Russian Federation.”

Vpered entangles itself in an insoluble contradiction, ascribing the protection of the Ossetians to the very Russian regime from which they dissociate themselves in the same breath. “The concrete balance of forces at an international level—as well as the great weakness of the international and Georgian workers’ movement—means that the population of Ossetia today has no other defenders than the Russian imperialist armies.”

The September issue of *International Viewpoint*, the English-language magazine of the United Secretariat, to which the LCR belongs, also contains two articles on the Caucasus conflict: the

previously cited Vpered article and a further article from the British magazine *Socialist Resistance*.

The latter also describes the Caucasus war as an “inter-imperialist struggle between Russian and US imperialism where Georgia functions as the proxy of the US,” however attributing far greater responsibility to the US and NATO than Vpered.

But their conclusions are the same. Both Vpered and *Socialist Resistance* express their unreserved and unqualified support for the principle of national self-determination, for “the full and unrestricted right to self-determination,” as Vpered puts it.

The consistent implementation of this principle would entail the complete balkanisation of the Caucasus, dividing it into countless, ethnically defined petty states, which would fight endlessly over borders, suppressing and driving out ethnic minorities and, since they would never be sustainable within the global economy, becoming the cat’s paw of the great powers. It would unleash a terrible scenario similar to the one witnessed in the Balkans after the dissolution of Yugoslavia, as can already be seen in parts of the Caucasus.

For a long time, Marxists have maintained that the solution of the national question is inseparably bound up with the question of the socialist revolution. Only a socialist federation can guarantee the peaceful coexistence of the numerous nationalities in the Caucasus.

The October Revolution of 1917 found such a solution, which was soon sabotaged, however, by the Great Russian chauvinism of the ascendant Stalinist bureaucracy. Indeed, shortly before his death, Lenin conflicted with Stalin over the Georgian question. Seven decades later, with the dissolution of the Soviet Union, national conflicts boiled up unhindered and were used by the imperialist powers to penetrate into the Caucasus and Central Asia.

It should be noted that neither the LCR nor its international co-thinkers even consider a socialist solution or refer to the experiences of the Soviet Union. The working class does not exist in their considerations as an independent political force. This says much about their social orientation. The insistence on independent statehood has become the hallmark of those petty bourgeois elements that strive for social ascent and a privileged relationship with the imperialist powers.



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