

The LCR covers for “left” supporters of French imperialism in Afghanistan

Support from the LCR

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On September 20, demonstrations were held in 10 different French cities demanding the withdrawal of NATO troops from Afghanistan. Protests against the war in Afghanistan were also held in a number of other European countries, including Britain, Italy and Germany.

The protests in France were called by an alliance of around 50 organisations formed in May under the name “Afghanistan-NATO—Neither war nor military alliance; Peace, Liberty, Democracy.”

Amongst the more prominent organisations in this open-ended collective are, alongside the Ligue Communiste Révolutionnaire (LCR—Revolutionary Communist League), the Stalinist French Communist Party (Parti communiste français—PCF), the Greens, such “broad churches” as the Peace Movement and the anti-globalisation organisation Attac, the teachers union FSU, the SUD trade union, sections of the CGT union federation (Confédération générale du travail), the French branch of the Catholic Peace organisation Pax Christi and the Afghan National Congress, a bourgeois movement that strives to establish a “democratic and secular” government in Afghanistan.

As was the case in Britain and Germany, the demonstrations in France served merely a token function and in no way reflected the opposition by a broad majority of the French population to the country’s military intervention in Afghanistan. It became clear in the course of the day that the organisers of the protests had made no real effort to mobilise support. Just 3,000 (2,000 according to police figures) participated in the largest march in Paris. In other cities the numbers of those participating numbered between 500 (Marseille) and 30 (Mulhouse). In many cases the number of demonstrators was less than the total number of organisations that had called for the protests in the first place.

It was obvious that the aim of the demonstrations was not to mobilise mass resistance to the war in Afghanistan. Rather its real purpose was to establish new political alliances on the “left.” Under conditions where ruling president Nicholas Sarkozy is widely unpopular and his government is deeply divided over foreign policy issues, the ruling elite in France may soon require the services of a new left prop.

Just last week Sarkozy was forced to withdraw two laws following massive public opposition—a law permitting the setting up of a secret data bank, “Edvige,” which would contain the personal details of all French citizens over the age of 13, and a new “environmental” consumer tax. The president’s popularity slumped in opinion polls to a new low. He reacted by publicly reprimanding the two ministers and political heavyweights in his ruling UMP responsible for the draft laws— Michèle Alliot-Marie and Jean-Louis Borloo.

The escalation of the war in Afghanistan has also strengthened the opposition to the foreign policy of Sarkozy, who has adopted a much more pro-American stance than his predecessors. Those calling for more distance from Washington are getting louder—and not just in Paris.

Following the crisis in Georgia and the latest escalation of the finance crisis, there is a growing chorus of voices in capitals across Europe calling for more political independence from the United States.

In France the differences in the ruling elite over foreign policy intensified following the death of 10 French soldiers in Afghanistan several weeks ago.

The Sarkozy government reacted to the outcry following the deaths by announcing it would prolong and increase French military involvement. Pierre Lellouche, a Sarkozy UMP party deputy heading a parliamentary commission on French military aims in Afghanistan, openly criticised Defence Minister Hervé Morin for not being hawkish enough. “It’s a war in Afghanistan, not a police operation,” Lellouche said.

Former prime minister Dominique de Villepin, on the other hand, warned against the “danger of getting stuck in a quagmire” and proposed a “strategy of withdrawal.” “One cannot win with military means a war against a guerrilla that enjoys increasing support from the population,” he wrote.

The demonstration calling for troop withdrawal was scheduled two days before the government asked parliament to sanction the “prolonging of the intervention of the armed forces in Afghanistan.” The French National Assembly debated and approved the Afghan mission on Monday, after the government had already sent extra troops to Afghanistan, without waiting for parliament’s approval. While the deputies of the government majority voted in favour, those of the Socialist Party (PS), the French Communist Party (PCF) and the Green party voted against, although the Socialist Party in general supports the military intervention in Afghanistan.

The collective that prepared the demonstrations served as a forum to work out a common political line acceptable to that section of the political elite in France calling for greater political independence from Washington. The appeal for demonstrations put out by the collective limited itself to the call for the withdrawal of troops from Afghanistan and made no attempt to analyse the war aims of French or international imperialism.

The appeal supports French intervention in Afghanistan, provided it takes place independently of the US and is based on political and “humanitarian” means instead of military ones. It is concerned that the continued military occupation will lead to a strengthening of the Taliban and associated forces that could regain power: “Insecurity has developed. In this situation, the Taliban might gain a new legitimacy.”

It continues: “We reject a France aligned with the American strategy” and demands France “undertake an independent policy based on law, the requirements of collective and preventive security and disarmament, and develop with all countries cooperation in favour of long-lasting development and human rights.”

This approach is compatible with that of the French Communist Party,

the Greens and the Socialist Party, who were all part of the Jospin government that originally dispatched French troops to Afghanistan in 2001. It is even compatible with that of François Bayrou's conservative Mouvement Démocrate (ex-UDF) and sections of the ruling Union pour un Mouvement Populaire (Union for a Popular Movement—UMP), who think that Sarkozy has aligned French foreign policy too closely to that of the Bush administration and US imperialism.

Support from the LCR

The LCR was not only very actively involved in preparing the demonstrations, but was also eager to deepen its collaboration with the PCF and the Greens. On the Paris demonstration LCR spokesman Olivier Besancenot marched alongside the Socialist Party senator Jean-Luc Mélenchon and the Green Party deputy Martine Billard.

The LCR is currently preparing the highly publicised founding of a “new anti-capitalist party” (NPA), which purports to be independent of the established parties of the left. However, its role in the preparation of the Afghanistan demonstrations proves just the opposite.

If one reads the statements and articles by the LCR on Afghanistan, one is first struck by the fact that they offer no concrete analysis of any major political question. There is no analysis of the policy of French and international imperialism in Central Asia, nor of the situation facing the working class and dangers it faces. Nor does this “anti-capitalist party” mention the need for a socialist perspective against war and colonialism. Indeed their standpoints offer little difference from the statements of other parties and organisations in the “collective.”

One finds the recurrent reproach: Sarkozy has aligned French foreign policy too closely with that of the Bush administration and US imperialism. One finds the concern that the continued military occupation will lead to a strengthening of the Taliban and associated forces and that these could eventually come back to power. For the LCR, France should focus on “reconstruction” and “humanitarian aid” instead of increased military spending. It never scrutinises the class nature of such “humanitarian” policies, which, as a rule, are simply a different form of pursuing imperialist aims.

The LCR explicitly shared the perspective of the demonstration, which was to ask the Sarkozy government itself to make the changes proposed. “We demand from the deputies and from the President of the Republic that they command the withdrawal of the French military measures and that they work for a solution that favours the reconstruction and the sovereignty of Afghanistan,” reads the common appeal.

Though the LCR did not call for the sending of United Nations troops, it did not criticise those organisations such as the PCF and the Greens that explicitly call for such a “solution.”

The LCR is intensively courting the PCF, which has been one of the most important props of bourgeois rule in France over the past 70 years. On the occasion of the PCF's annual *Humanité* festival, Olivier Besancenot wrote a servile letter addressed to “Dear Marie-George” and the “dear comrades” of the PCF. He reminded PCF National Secretary Marie-George Buffet that “we have often found ourselves together in many political and resistance struggles.” He continued, “Our alliances and strategy” are not always the same but, “It seems to us that the time has come to once again restore the dialogue in order to counter the avalanche of evil attacks undertaken by capitalism on the entire population.”

While the discredited party of recycled Stalinism has some misgivings about Sarkozy's policy and has signed the common appeal, it is not opposed to French involvement in Afghanistan. Buffet was recently quoted saying, “The fight against the Taliban must be conducted.” She

fully supports the colonial enterprise labelled the “war on terrorism.” The PCF newspaper *L'Humanité* wrote September 6, “Minister of Defence Hervé Morin calls for ‘the unity of the country in the fight against terrorism.’ Who couldn't subscribe to this?”

Buffet was part of Sarkozy's multiparty delegation to Beirut when he went there under conditions of mounting crisis for US imperialism, presented himself as the broker of a deal between the various Lebanese factions and tried to put French imperialism back onto the political and economic map in the Middle East. Sarkozy's stated aim in taking the PCF and the SP on board was to demonstrate the “unity of France” in its “support” of Lebanon.

In an August 22 statement on Afghanistan the PCF, while calling for the withdrawal of French troops, insisted that France “must, in the UN, with its European partners, provoke an urgent new look at the peace operations.” NATO is thus the problem, while French and European imperialism as well as the UN are urged to meddle in the affairs of Afghanistan.

The longing of the LCR for political promiscuity doesn't stop with the PCF. The LCR/NPA would also have liked the Socialist Party to join their unity campaign. In his open letter to the PCF, Besancenot states, “To speak frankly, the leadership of the Socialist Party remained silent on our propositions so far.”

While the SP has tactical differences with the Sarkozy government, mainly on the question of the ostensible alignment of its foreign policy to the US, it fully supports the neo-colonial “war on terror.” In the midst of the commotion produced by the soldiers' deaths last month in Afghanistan, and all the questioning of the French presence there, the SP rushed to support French military presence there.

Another ally wooed by the LCR is the Green Party. This party complained bitterly when Sarkozy initially did not include them in his diplomatic throng en-route to Beirut. In Afghanistan, they are in favour of a settlement through the UN. The Greens' web site carried no appeal for the September 20 demonstrations, nor has it published an article on the war in Afghanistan since April 2.

On that date they wrote: “Only an international police force of interposition duly mandated by the UN could facilitate a cease fire, the opening of negotiations between the warring Afghan factions, the recognition of the democratic Afghan forces, a government of reconciliation.” And they added: “Mr. Sarkozy departs from the traditional Gaullist policy of French independence, he relies on the injunctions of the Bush administration. The Greens must oppose this and denounce this drifting away.”

As for the “Mouvement de la Paix”—a broad umbrella for all sorts of middle class and bourgeois political, social and religious views—it favours French involvement in Afghanistan in order to strengthen the repressive forces of the state: “The French government has decided to send more troops to Afghanistan for war missions and not for reasons of training police and military personnel.” This organisation, like the Greens, explicitly supports the UN.

The LCR, like the PCF and the other organisations that signed the joint appeal, are not in principle opposed to the grabbing and plundering of the resources of other nations and the sacrificing of the lives of working class youth for these aims. Like other sections of the bourgeoisie, however, they favour a different policy. They would be quite ready to send the same “imperialist” troops under the auspices of the UN, or the European Union, which would enable France to have some sort of leverage against the US. The present role of France in former Yugoslavia, or the recent sending of troops to Chad, has not justified in their eyes any “common resistance” to the Sarkozy government.

The call for the withdrawal of troops by the LCR is nothing less than a ploy to give credibility to organisations that are staunch defenders of French imperialism. The LCR's consistent call for unity on single issues

is their mechanism for stifling political clarity, maintaining the credibility of their “friends” and tying the working class and youth to the old bureaucracies by refraining from any critique of these forces. This demonstrates the role of the LCR as the left flank of the bourgeoisie—their prostration before the Stalinists and consistent reference to the SP as part of the left is sufficient proof.

What is needed is a socialist programme against war and colonialism, based on an independent political mobilisation of the working class against all those attempting to latch on to the coattails of the imperialist bourgeoisies.



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