

France: LCR holds meeting for New Anti-Capitalist Party in St. Denis

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On September 27 and 28, the Revolutionary Communist League (Ligue communiste révolutionnaire-LCR) held a meeting in the north Paris suburb of St. Denis. WSWs reporters attended the meeting, which was titled "National gathering of wage earners and people deprived of employment" and billed as a meeting recruiting for and preparing the LCR's founding of the New Anti-Capitalist Party (NPA) in January 2009.

The LCR and its presidential candidate, Olivier Besancenot, are receiving substantial publicity from the bourgeois media and capitalizing on popular hostility to the more traditional "left" parties--the bourgeois Socialist Party (PS) and the Stalinist French Communist Party (PCF). With its NPA initiative, the LCR hopes to recruit a substantial layer of workers and youth on the basis of hostility to the pro-business policies of President Nicolas Sarkozy. The St. Denis meeting underscored that the LCR aims to train its recruits on the basis, not of revolutionary Marxism, but of trade union protest politics.

The meeting was structured around two introductions, given by a panel of speakers in a plenary session, and eight subsequent commissions on various topics of economic and daily life: wages, sackings, health and safety at work, prices, social protection, public services, and two commissions on trade unionism.

Around 350 people from all over France took part, most of them in their forties and fifties. Those who spoke to WSWs reporters were members of the union bureaucracy or close to it.

The two introductory sessions carried the headings: "How to fight against the divisions in the working class through the multiplication of categories, work contract, the generalisation of insecure jobs, and the trade union instruments for organising, fighting and resisting?" and

"What demands, what action programme will the NPA bring to serve the mobilisations, the workers, on a daily basis?"

A speaker at the first session said, "The action [against recent job cuts at automaker Renault and tire company Goodyear] can't just be the concern of the workers affected. That means making it everybody's business.... We need a response at a higher level, a national, across the industries response ... a mobilisation to demand that sackings, socially and humanly unacceptable, be outlawed, impose the right to work as an absolute right which comes before profits."

The second section of the introduction was dedicated to the "action programme" of the NPA, which it presented as an "emergency programme" needed to answer the most "urgent needs" of the population. It demanded a ban on sackings, a law against job insecurity, the abrogation of recently passed pension cuts, a "massive reduction" of the working week, and the creation of jobs. One prominent demand was increasing the minimum wage of €1500 after tax--a proposal made in the 2007 presidential election by the PS candidate, Ségolène Royal. The speakers also demanded price controls and an indexation of wages to inflation, to be overseen by the trade unions.

It is characteristic of the LCR's politics that it proposes to carry out its measures, which would threaten the most basic interests of the capitalist class, by appealing for trade union action to pressure the French state and courts. Nowhere does the LCR explain that the union bureaucracy and the bourgeois state pursue a very definite class line, corresponding to powerful material interests, completely precluding the type of Pauline conversion that would be required for them to decide to carry out the LCR's proposals.

Even limiting oneself to events after the election of

Sarkozy, it is clear the unions and state acted in concert to ram through austerity measures directed against the working class. The different trade union federations participated in close negotiations with Sarkozy to prepare his program of pension and social cuts, as Sarkozy himself acknowledged in an April 18 article in the daily *Le Monde*, titled "For strong unions."

Sarkozy wrote: "Right after the presidential elections and even before going to the Elysée [presidential palace], I met with trade unions and business groups to listen to them and ask for their positions on the first actions I was planning on taking. Since then, I have continued to very regularly meet with each of their representatives. I know them well, we sometimes have divergences, but our dialogue is always frank." The entire course of events of Sarkozy's presidency shows that he was, in this case, telling the truth.

Of his first major action-cutting "special regime" pensions for state workers in rail, energy, and other strategic sectors-Sarkozy wrote, "The reform of the special regime pensions [was] successfully carried out last fall, thanks to an intense period of coordination at a national level, and negotiations in each enterprise affected by the reform."

In October 2007, the CGT union largely managed to limit rail strikes to a one-day struggle, despite overwhelming opposition from rail workers. In November 2007 the unions called further strikes in the rail sector, but refused to link those strikes to other strikes by students and public sector workers. All the strikes were ultimately defeated.

As Sarkozy's popularity plummeted in the early months of 2008, he made a great show of negotiating his upcoming social policies with the unions. This resulted in the so-called "common position" agreement between Sarkozy and the unions in April 2008. In exchange for a reform of union funding rules, the unions acknowledged they were negotiating major reforms in labor laws, the effective lengthening of the workweek beyond 35 hours, and other social cuts. These laws were finalized and passed in late July.

The LCR is well aware of popular discontent and hostility to the collaborationist line of the union bureaucracy, and seeks to channel this hostility into efforts to reform the unions by the application of militant pressure. Thus one of the conference's sessions had the theme: "What sort of class struggle trade

unionism today?" During the session, one of its organisers asked, "How can we develop tendencies and structures which are somewhat 'class struggle,' which raise demands and fight?"

A leaflet given to the participants read: "It won't be enough to call endless days of action like the trade union leaderships did last year, but one has to build a unified movement.... Support every struggle of workers on strike ... demonstrate and act ... multiply and relay the unitary fronts of resistance to the government's policy."

The question of what such a mass movement of the working class could be based upon and, above all, a discussion of the traditions of revolutionary Marxism embodied in the political legacy of Leon Trotsky, were systematically suppressed at the meeting. One participant at the "action programme" section jokingly referred to "a certain Tr... am I allowed to mention him?"

When WSWS reporters asked afterwards why Trotsky's historical analyses and political legacy were not more actively discussed at the meeting, they received the reply: "We can't bash people over the head with Trotsky. It'll frighten them off."



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